







## EMERSON : HIS MUSE AND MESSAGE

Divine philosophy ! not harsh and crabbed,  
As dull fools suppose, but musical as is Apollo's  
flute ;  
And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets, where  
no dull surfeit waits.'

— *Milton*



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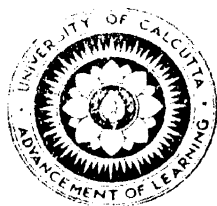
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UNTO ALL  
EMERSON'S  
'UNITARIANS OF THE UNITED WORLD



## FOREWORD

The foreword—the first word—must be a word of apology for the apparently disproportionate bulk assumed by the following pages. One chief plea for this ‘enormity’ is that, whatever may be said of brevity as the soul of wit, love is hardly ever conscious of overlong lingerings in the presence of its object. Another inevitable reason may be found in the scope of the work itself—in case devotion at least to the great Master proves strong enough to sustain a patient perusal to the end.

That scope has been widely comprehensive—to focus, as in a ‘critique,’ the shifting view-points of literary judgment, original as well as authoritative, general as well as specific ; to fix, as in a ‘review,’ the abiding features of the personality as also of the pronouncement ; and to furnish, as in a ‘key,’ analytical expositions of all the important, individual poems together with indications, as far as may be, of the outer circumstances of their origin. Signs may not be wanting in this labour of love, primarily the embodiment of private, independent musings and meditations, of a sincere endeavour to combine with the advantage of a handbook of occasional reference what is far more difficult of attainment, considering

the nature of the theme, namely, the attraction of an organic and connectedly readable thesis.

As to the value of Emerson for the inmost faith and hope of spirits like the writer's, to reduce here into form what ought naturally to pervade the entire work were but too jarringly formal and too obtrusively personal. Quiet content, then, if not secure confidence, may leave it to kindred, discerning souls to adjudge how far the warrant for the work itself consists merely in the 'excuse' of Emerson's accredited greatness and how far more in the 'constraint' of gratitude for his living inspiration.

The opening paragraph of Lord Morley's Essay in the *Critical Miscellanies* begins and ends with the reservations, 'A great interpreter of life ought not himself to need interpretation, least of all can he need it for contemporaries'; and 'For our time at least Emerson may best be left to be his own expositor.' Words like these from such an oracle are simply forbidding and necessarily excite trepidation in the extreme. May not indebtedness, however, be allowed its own avowal even where 'interpretation' is ruled out as beyond reach and requirement?

A teacher like Emerson, doubtless, gives new openings to the commentator, even as he affords no lack of food to the contemplator. More is to be gained from him by the pursuit of sympathetic study than lost by the abjuration of superior

criticism. Hence, the saner and wiser method, instinctively preferred, of citation and appreciation, communion and assimilation, cannot fail to commend itself in view of its own objective.

The body of extant critical opinion has been reverently yet not implicitly laid under free contribution and under general survey. Occasional lines of filiation to Indian thought have been suggestively, if only succinctly, traced, as is not inappropriate in an Indian tributary to the literature on the subject. While their general unfamiliarity has rendered typical extracts in copious measure the more necessary in dealing with the specific groups of poems, the choice of such extracts has been a great difficulty and their curtailment a still greater trial.

To the many and manifold failings of his ambitious enterprise the author is only too keenly alive. Yet his main encouragement rests upon Carlyle's 'comfort' that 'Great Men, taken up in any way, are profitable company' and Emerson's own assurance that, "though foolishly spoken," words "may be wisely heard." At all events, the time is not yet for any just complaint as to an over-abundance of Emersoniana, especially upon the Poems. To be of service, never so slight, in leading a few sober and devoted spirits among the lovers of literature and of the higher life and thought upward to the Milky Way of the original poems, "full of light and of deity" even



like “ the eternal sky ” in the poem, *Each And All*—this is alone the aim, and this will suffice as the more than due recompense, of the present task, ‘ constituting an exhaustive study and criticism of the published work ’ of one of the foremost figures of our age. Such investigations, however feeble, cannot but, in their own measure, tend to the advancement of knowledge, centering as they do round ‘ the American Scholar ’ whose precept and example together must ever reckon as an inestimable asset to the sacred cause of true, liberal education so passionately urged by Wordsworth in the words,

‘ Knowledge, methinks, in these disordered times,  
Should be allowed a privilege to have  
Her anchorites, like piety of old.’

Would that the failure of the undertaking, if such must be the issue, might provoke, and be proved by, success in worthier hands !

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Part I—General:  
MIND AND ART



# EMERSON:

## HIS MUSE AND MESSAGE

### CHAPTER I

#### INTRODUCTORY

A phenomenon, not uncommon but none the less remarkable, in the history of literature is the circumstance that the superior excellence of part of a great writer's work tends not only to dwarf into comparative inferiority but to reduce to, almost absolute insignificance the real, though lesser, merit of the rest of his own work. Thus *Paradise Regained* has come unquestionably to suffer beside *Paradise Lost*, as even the best part of Milton's prose has been thrown into the shade by his own poetry. And this, although the architectonic stateliness and the orchestral symphony of a style to be characterised in no better wise than as 'simply Miltonic' is not less marked in the Discourses than in the Epics. Likewise, among modern writers of eminence, with perhaps but a few happy exceptions like Walter Scott and Matthew Arnold, the same has been the case, more or less, as between the prose and poetic contributions of each single author.

Of such aberrations in appraisalment one other signal instance is afforded in the relative position assigned by common verdict to the poetical works, as compared with the prose writings, of Ralph

Waldo Emerson, one of the privileged few even of these latter days 'whose names have surrounded themselves with an atmosphere of religion'<sup>1</sup> The former, it may be said, are as little known as the latter are widely celebrated. Accordingly, the most passionate admirers of this master-mind who drink deep at the fount of his Essays and Addresses are found content to leave untasted the Pierian spring of his verse, while there are not a few among the general students of literature who are simply unaware of Emerson as a poet.

The meagreness of his poetry, for one thing, may not alone account for its all but entire neglect. For, in point of bulk, it does hold no mean share in the whole volume of Emerson's works. Neither is it that his poetic labours belong to the prentice-hand of youth or to the palsied hand of age that they should be brushed aside as lacking in real interest and importance. Nor is it true, again, that he only took to the weaving of rhymes as the literary luxury of a stray pastime or a side-diversion. Far from this, like the kindred soul of Carlyle—kindred, that is, save for the diversities quaintly depicted by Lowell in *A Fable for Critics*—his was a spirit so terribly in earnest about the purposiveness of life as never to spend itself on 'the idle song of an empty day.' Far from being at any point the impulsive utterance of a passing mood or

<sup>1</sup> John Morley : *Critical Miscellanies*

incident, Emerson's verse, is, throughout, the deliberate expression of the calmest philosophic thought with little in it of a merely occasional or accidental character. This, at least, remains a fact, that, whereas in respect of popularity Emerson's poetry stands eclipsed by his prose, even the ground of appreciation of this prose is to be sought in the charm, consciously or unconsciously felt, of its supremely poetic quality.

This quality arises out of the fact that, throughout, Emerson discloses himself as the philosopher in the essayist and as the poet behind the philosopher. The belief that philosophy will one day be taught by the poets leads him, evermore, to do his best to hasten that day. Consistently with his own conception of art, his writings have for their aim not to please but to edify. And compatibly with his own temperament, the method more or less uniformly followed in his garnering of wisdom is the direct, intuitive method of poetic vision. As such, the philosopher-essayist and the poet-philosopher merge into the born seer—the *drashta*, as we designate him. And it turns out that the transcendentalist in thought is the poet in expression, alike in both species of composition. Hence, the so-called prose essays, more lyrical than logical in tone, are also so many poetic musings of an imaginative mind only free from the formal conventions of metre. An essentially poetic genius as he is, his productions are redolent of the poetry of



idealism in sentiment and resonant with the poetry of melody in art. Thus the happy harmony of his sweet, simple, syllabic strains bears mystic messages of elevated emotion and entranced imagination. Where in his writings, barring a few quasi-syllogistic portions, do you find Emerson merely prosaic, limping on the flat levels of ratiocination? Are they not, on the other hand, better described as shadows of his eagle wings, half-revealed and half-concealed, soaring over the steep summits of illumination? In that contemplation of the issues of life as a whole which makes the philosopher, he did not build a system of closely connected conclusions out of the materials of the understanding. But he did seize upon the sum, and see into the soul, of things, as the vision rolled before the eye of the spirit. Judges there are of unquestioned eminence who, in all sincerity, grudge him the laurel of the poet as well as the role of the philosopher—the former, because ‘he rose too much on his tip-toe for the poet ;’<sup>1</sup> and the latter, not only because ‘he was too broken in his insights for a philosopher’s steady continuity of thought’<sup>1</sup> but also ‘his idealism, which was in part stimulated by contemporaneous discoveries in science, does not on the whole appeal to the practical, positivistic frame of mind superinduced by those discoveries, and it is too insubstan-

<sup>1</sup> R. H. Hutton : *Contemporary Thought and Thinkers*

tial and cold to satisfy such souls as have rebelled against the dominance of materialistic conceptions of the universe.'<sup>1</sup> Yet they would all profoundly honour him with the mantle of the prophet-seer as, at the least, 'a great, though uncertain, oracle.' But then, broken statements, contradictory assertions, disconnected links of argument—these, in outer embodiment, partake of the soul of all poetry with its licensed elusiveness of import. And these abound in Emerson at every turn, not, however, as suggestions of faltering suspense, but as adumbrations of firm assurance. That is because the consistency of analysis—that "hobgoblin of little minds," as he calls it<sup>2</sup>—disappears behind the comprehension of synthesis. So that, as in his own case the organ of apprehension is not the plodding reason but the passive soul, the appeal in the case of his hearers, too, always becomes more readily intelligible to the heart than to the head, the one seeing farther than the other. Emerson's pages, studded with no end of short, sparkling sentences crammed with allusive, ethereal significance, recall the spacious firmament on high lit by the scintillations of untold stars shedding the mild radiance that so cheers the heart, and illumines the path, of such as would turn away, now and again, from the earth-bound over-sensuality of the age.

<sup>1</sup> W. P. Trent: *American Literature*

<sup>2</sup> Essay on *Self-Reliance*

No case of special pleading but a challenge from intrinsic worth is the claim preferred for his poems as for his prose writings, linked as they are by the common bands of his philosophy of life. Little consideration is here due to that shallow criticism which is provoked, perchance, by the toughness of his thought, if not also by the terseness of his expression, into the scant courtesy of deriding him as the queer man's queerer philosopher. However discounted in certain quarters, his lofty teaching—lofty even in that it suggests more than it states—surely has not lost an iota of its appeal to this day. All apparent waning of greatness, if any, is due, paradoxically enough, to that very greatness in one who 'has so leavened the thought of America...that the latter-day reader receives as a matter of course utterances that thrilled the bosoms of youthful Americans two generations ago.'<sup>1</sup> So that the patient diver must still continue to find rich recompense in pearls of great price beyond computation. Amid the unspeakably depressing conditions of the present with its helter-skelter of ambitions, earth-hungry and blood-thirsty, what a positive source of faith and hope it must prove to remember that this mighty seer's rule over the thought-life of the modern world has not grown obsolete in any degree but that he still holds in fee the better mind and heart of humanity ! The sore-troubled, heavy-

<sup>1</sup> W. P. Trent : *American Literature*

laden spirit of disquietude is, as ever, lifted by him to heights whence, after the *sangavarjitah* of the *Gita*, it can contemplate the welter of the world with a selfless serenity born of the overwhelming sense that "It is only the finite that has wrought and suffered, the infinite lies stretched in smiling repose." But these soarings up into the sky are only to nerve the soul to more sustained strivings down upon the soil. Always, in Emerson, the most transcendental flights are followed by a swift descent to the daily paths of toil in dust and dirt, in mist and mire. 'Ethereal minstrel ! pilgrim of the sky !', he is the very

'Type of the wise that soar, but never roam ;

'True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home !'

An ever-restful dream that Life is Beauty, coupled and complemented with an ever-wakeful consciousness that Life is Duty—from such a balanced frame of mind what peace and pleasantness may not accrue ? And as to the real helpfulness of Emerson's poems in this regard, be it noted at the outset that we have it on the authority of so discriminating a scholar and critic as Prof. C. M. Bakewell that 'the true Emersonian prizes the poems above the essays, for into them the wisdom of the essays is packed and given perfect speech.'<sup>1</sup>

As a poet, Emerson stands in relation to, and by the side of, that glorious group of New England

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *Emerson's Poems* (Everyman's Library)

brother-poets, Longfellow, Whittier, O. W. Holmes and J. R. Lowell, as also the Middle States disciple-poet, Walt Whitman, who all shine out from their enduring niches in the Temple of Apollo. His length of days nearly coincided with theirs in that Golden Age of American Literature, thus making them his contemporaries and comrades for full sixty-three out of the seventy-nine years of his life from 1803 to 1882. In fact, he held long-extended and acknowledged sway over that remarkable commonwealth of letters by right not merely of seniority of birth but of a self-poised independence of life and art. Lineal descendants those of the renowned Pilgrim Fathers in every fibre of their being, they all severally steered some distances further ahead the imperishable *Mayflower* of Progressive Protestantism, voyaging forth, each under the lodestar of his own original genius, away from the ancient moorings of the customary, the conventional and the commonplace and far into the high seas of so-called 'Heresy.' Coming together upon such common ground as nature-worship, patriotic devotion, hatred of oppression and of slavery, and fervent religious liberalism, those intrepid captains sailed, of course, under the same tricoloured banner of the life of Nature, the liberty of Man and the love of God. Each, nevertheless, drew from a specific direction the driving power for his bark of poesy. Longfellow did so from the

sociology of simple humanity ; Whittier from the religion of pure spirituality ; Whitman from the politics of broad democracy ; Holmes from the ethics of refined urbanity ; Lowell from the ideology of liberal culture ; and Emerson, lastly, from the philosophy of profound self-realisation, wonderfully gathering up those several inspirations into one. Amidst the very vortex of internal strife between vested interests and native instincts, the other poets, Whitman in particular, displayed more the vehement energy of pure passion, while Emerson exhibited more the sedate power of tranquillised insight. Accordingly, the fierce trumpet-blast of triumph without was clearly marked off from, as it also prepared the way for, the gentle clarion-call to advance within, in so far as ' the exaltation of national character produced by the Civil War opened new and wide acceptance for a great moral and spiritual teacher.' <sup>1</sup> The minstrel of the *Tales of a Wayside Inn* and of *Evangeline* ; the bard of *Snow-Bound* and *The Panorama* ; the chanter of the declamations of the *Leaves of Grass* and *Drum-Taps* ; the poet-autocrat of *The Lost Leaf* and *The Chambered Nautilus* ; the satirist of *The Biglow Papers* and *The Present Crisis*—these, in their way, present striking lineaments of family likeness and, at the same time, more striking contrasts of

<sup>1</sup> Morley : *Critical Miscellanies*

individuality to the author of *May-Day* and *Wood-notes*, the *Concord Hymn* and *Voluntaries*, *The Problem* and *The World-Soul*. The ideal of the new era voiced itself in different strains through these diverse tongues. With purity of thought and beauty of language, it expressed itself, chiefly on the domestic plane, in Longfellow's narrative portrayal of the sweetness of human love through weal and woe. With superbness of sentiment and chasteness of diction, it revealed itself, mainly on the socio-spiritual plane, in Whittier's lyric utterance of the sacredness of the human soul beneath the fetters of organised serfdom. With breadth of sympathy and vigour, if also bluntness, of expression, self-distinguished as 'untamed and untranslatable,' it proclaimed itself, principally on the political plane, in Whitman's rugged rhymes upon the inviolability of the people's rights in the counsels of the commonweal. Again, with shrewdness of sense and resonance of strain, it impressed itself, primarily on the intellectual plane, in the quaint overtones of the twin-humourists, Holmes and Lowell, greater or better known, respectively, as essay-novelist and critic than as poets, the former, especially, the lighter and lesser of the two, as he was the latest lingerer of all. And with pregnancy of thought and perfectness of unconscious art, it found an exponent, pre-eminently on the psychological plane, in Emerson's meditative musings on the true inwardness and inclusiveness,

too, of the self. Thus, if the Promethean spark of celestial fire glared in the others oftentimes as heat, it glowed in him always as light. Also, in them the human interest reigned supreme, while the natural was not crushed out, as it could not possibly be in any genuine poet. In Emerson's case, his exquisite poetic susceptibilities presaged in him the qualification he himself required in the ideal man of culture—"the semi-god whom we await"—namely, that

" He must be musical,  
Tremulous, impressional,  
Alive to gentle influence  
Of landscape and of sky,  
And tender to the spirit-touch  
Of man's or maiden's eye."<sup>1</sup>

His heart was thus equally attuned to 'the still, sad music of humanity' and to the solemn, rapturous melody of nature. Hence, following the broad outlines of correspondence on either side of the ocean, we may call Emerson the Wordsworth—as, perhaps, Longfellow, with his romantic imagination, may be named the Scott; Whittier, with his non-academic sensitiveness, the Robert Burns and, with his maturer artistic delicacy, the Tennyson; Whitman, with his humanitarian interest, the Browning; Holmes, with his homeliness of merriment, the Thomas Hood or the later

<sup>1</sup> *Culture*



Austin Dobson; and Lowell, with his critical scholarship, the Matthew Arnold—of America.

While on this point, it may be well to note how singularly obvious is the twin brotherhood between him of Rydal Mount and him of Concord in the consanguinity of their relationship to Nature as the shekinah of a Living Presence and Personality—at once a seminary for the imbibing of wisdom and a sanctuary for the offering of worship. Face to face with Nature, both shared alike the observation of the scientist, the interpretation of the philosopher and the adoration of the priest. To both alike, rock and rill, bird and bower, star and shell, were vocal with the gladsome tidings of a peculiarly personal intercourse. For both alike, communion with the inmost secrets of Nature's hiding-places lent the inspiration of their deepest thought and soundest work. To Wordsworth the meanest flower that blows could give thoughts that did often lie too deep for tears. As for Emerson, the sight of the commonest hedge-rose would so stir the very depths of his soul that he literally used to pause and take off his hat in solemn reverence before it. The best part of the poetic production of Wordsworth, about whom his maid-servant remarked that her master's library lay outside though his books remained indoors, was, it is said, the outcome of a habit, while striding busily along over hill and dale, of humming to himself extempore compositions of

whole passages, which that guardian angel of a sister, sweet Dorothy, ever ready with recording tablets, would studiously follow and copy down on the spot ; and whenever thought or expression whirled round without the onward flow, he used to halt and swing about more briskly backward and forward, waving his hands freely in the air and abstracting his mind still further until the arrest of the eddy was overcome. So, too, with Emerson, his real thinking or, as he himself called it, his thought-hunting after the manner of a boy's butterfly-hunting, was all done out in the open in direct touch with Nature, whose stray, spontaneous suggestions in the course of his wonted rambles through sylvan solitudes went at once into a 'Thought-book' to be later knit together on occasion into those Essays, Addresses and Poems which form perhaps the most brilliant contribution American literature has made to the world's wares. We shall, then, be prepared to find in Emerson, as we proceed, many Wordsworthian touches in matter as well as in manner—resonances, so to speak, of "Pan's recording voice,"<sup>1</sup> as Wordsworth aptly is styled by Emerson himself.

For the most part, Emerson's poems—and their very titles are half-poems in themselves—comprise short swallow-flights of song that dip their wings in the current of philosophical thought and

<sup>1</sup> *May-Day*.

ethical feeling. They are reflective but not heavy; pithy yet not commonplace; full of learned grandeur and not devoid of lyric grace; with a felicity of phrase equalled only by richness of fancy. Several of his lines enshrine so many clear-chiselled, neatly-rounded epigrams and aphorisms on life which, applying to him his own words, we may aver, "disconcert us with glad surprise" <sup>1</sup> or, as Wordsworth would put it, 'disturb us with the joy of elevated thoughts.'

In the main, the Poems, according to subject-matter, divide themselves into these broad classes—Poems of Art; Poems of Nature; Poems of Individual Life: Metaphysical, Moral and Personal; Poems of Public Life: Social, Political and Occasional or Commemorative; Poems of Beauty and Love; and Poems of Religion. As for the channel of their publication, some of the pieces like *Saadi*, *The Snow-Storm*, *Woodnotes* and *The Sphinx* appeared first in *The Dial*, the organ of the Transcendentalist Movement from 1840 to 1844 with Emerson himself as Editor during the latter half of its existence. Others came out subsequently as contributions to Lowell's *Atlantic Monthly*, established in 1857. The first collection was made in 1847 and the final version in 1876.

<sup>1</sup> *Worship*.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE ARTIST

Some general impressions of the poet's art and mind gathered up in as small a compass as possible will prove of help before entering upon the study of individual poems.

It might appear already, and still more so on the completion of the studies, as though a superlative strain of wholesale laudation had been struck throughout. In so far as that is so, the only plea to make is that Emerson is one of those rare masters in whose regard the offering of appreciation means vastly greater gain than the giving up of criticism involves loss.

As to criticism, no writer lends himself to it more easily in point of both matter and manner. In fact, no censor has shown up Emerson's limitations more pointedly than he himself through his confessions in the ever memorable correspondence with Carlyle.

All in all, his imperfections, such as they are, relate to his method rather than to his message. For, in him even defects of the latter kind are mainly traceable to defects of the former, while all his defects are, indeed, the defects of his qualities by that very law of compensation which he himself so well interprets. Hence, in his case, especially, diversity of estimate arises from difference

in relative emphasis. Shortly put, the drift of extant judgment, quite authoritative, of course, in every way, is to the effect that Emerson the singer is inferior to Emerson the seer ; that he is not so much a stylist or even thought-builder as a prophet and life-instiller ; and, lastly, that in his own realm, the supreme domain of the spirit, he stands among the greatest of the great.

To confine ourselves, for the present, to the aspect of the artist. That neither the quality of style nor the faculty of music is Emerson's chief conscious aim or highest native gift may at once be granted. Yet, on some of the elements of style he does possess a marvellous hold, being (in Dr. R. Garnett's phrase) <sup>1</sup> ' a connoisseur in style ' and preferring, as he does, the organic in classic to the spontaneous in romantic art. The question of thought apart, one patent charm of *naivete* about his expression derives itself from a strong affection for simple, Tennysonian vocables, a keen relish for telling, Carlylean phrases and a natural aptitude for concise, Baconian sentences—all governed by a strict regard to delicious limpidness of language amid the subtlest overtures of meaning and suggestion. ' Rich and homely diction like home-spun cloth of gold '—such is its characterisation in *My Study Windows*, where Lowell affirms that ' For choice and pith of language he belongs to a better age than ours and might rub shoulders with Fuller

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* ( ' Great Writers ' ).

and Browne.' As Augustine Birrell observes in the *Obiter Dicta*, 'His sentences fall over you in glittering cascades, beautiful and bright and for the most part refreshing.' In his significant epithets and well-rounded epigrams touched with poetic hue, Emerson shows, without detriment to that spontaneity of word and phrase which is distinctive of 'the grand style,' a strength and concentration of language that recalls the fine artificers of the correct school of Pope with the closest rhetorical condensations, however thin and scanty, and the most glittering points and aphorisms ever fresh and far from dull.

But the language, albeit so exquisite and striking, is employed only as a medium of expression. It is the thought that arrests the attention—thought not infrequently imbued with the soul of poetry and invested with a neatly brilliant garb of form even in the prose writing, as is the case also with Coleridge and Landor, besides Milton, already referred to. For, here we have the authority of Lowell's comment that 'Though he writes in prose, he is essentially a poet.' Nay, Emerson himself said, "I am born a poet." This, notwithstanding the fact that, writing to Carlyle, he once called himself but "half a bard," and on another occasion met his exhortation to creative work with the disclaimer, "I do not belong to the poets, but only to a low department of literature—the reporters ; suburban men." Here, one is led to wonder whether this



self-disparagement on Emerson's part had not something to do with Carlyle's unconcealed dislike of modern verse-making in general. However, the truth of the whole matter was put in a nutshell when his friend, Frank Sanborn, remarked, 'Some of us think you can write nothing else,' in reference to Emerson's misgivings about his own power of poesy. Matthew Arnold in the *Discourses in America* and John Morley in the *Critical Miscellanies* apply to Emerson's poetry what they conceive absolutely as the highest test of poetics—the former distinctly adds, 'I esteem him too much to try his work by any other'—and, despite a good many commendable excellences, they both find it falling short of the supreme standard of the inevitable, the legitimate, the born masters of song. Again, Henry Van Dyke, writing for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, compares Emerson's verse with his prose and, while recognising in it 'perhaps a truer expression of his genius,' pronounces it 'inferior in form.' How the latter part of this last verdict may hold good he does not specify and it seems not quite easy to follow as against the view ventured in the beginning of the present study, namely, that the structural defects of the prose with its obliquities of grammar and obscurities of thought are, after all, not so prominent or provoking in the poetry.

Concerning the last named attribute of simplicity or directness in the poems, suffice it to note how

the consenting doctors differ. Arnold is 'often embarrassed' by their want of plainness and wholeness. Morley is uniformly pleased to credit them with 'the unvarnished simplicity of the Italian painters before Raphael.' Likewise, by the way, while, as to the office of poetry, Morley declares that 'Emerson has almost forgotten that it is part of the poet's business to give pleasure,' we get from Augustine Birrell the avowal that 'Emerson's poetry has at least one of the qualities of true poetry—it always pleases and occasionally delights.' According to Dr. Garnett's testimony, 'the Runic, Orphic, mystic and aphoristic element in his poetry'—what Hutton also refers to as 'the mystic dignity of gnostic runes'—'though there is too much of it, is still an original and valuable element. He always means something, and his meaning is always worth trying to penetrate. Better still, he always sings something: his verse, good or bad, is poetry; he does not, like some greater poets, chequer his inspired moods with commonplace or mere literary elegances.' What Garnett observes about the oration on *The American Scholar* applies equally to all the epigrammatic flashes which seem paradoxes until reflection proves them aphorisms.

If Emerson's poetry, on the whole, may not take rank with the poetry of the greater poets contemplated in the above comments, we may be permitted to echo Prof. W. P. Trent's conclusion that 'Not only is his volume of verses full of the



raw materials of poetry ; it contains enough genuinely fine poems and passages in varying styles to lift its author above the category of the minor poets.' We may take leave, at least, to reiterate our first conviction that it deserves altogether a worthier and more valuable place than his own prose, even because of movement in the atmosphere of poesy always so congenial to his genius. Prof. Bakewell's opinion that 'into them (the poems) the wisdom of the essays is packed and given perfect speech' has already been cited. Add to it (by way of the last word on this part of the subject) one other judgment, that of Julian Hawthorne in his laborious work, *The Masterpieces and the History of Literature*. 'It is probable,' says he, 'that Emerson's poems, few comparatively though they are, will outlive his prose, and the poetry of most of his contemporaries. In these, in spite of their ruggedness of outward form, there is inspiration of the finest sort, and a spiritual music of ineffable beauty and purity. They present the essence of his best philosophy in terse and profound metrical form ; they thrill with divine vitality.' Nay, more. 'The thought is so exquisite and uplifting that the outward roughness is a relief, enabling us to endure the better what would else be intolerable beauty.' At all events, though certainly not of the type of the highest creative work and all its minor flaws notwithstanding, Emerson's poetry, as agreed on all hands, is by

no means sparsely strewn with splendid passages of lofty imagination, profound feeling and penetrative insight.

First, about Emerson's fancy. His is surely one of the boldest of imaginations, now and then catching and concentrating the fire in a few verses. If occasionally we come upon incongruous images, we are compensated by happy comparisons packed with flavour and perfume distilled out of observation and experience. Here are a few vignettes picked out at random from the art-studio :

“ Behold the Sea,  
'The opaline, the plentiful and strong,  
Yet beautiful as is the rose in June,  
Fresh as the trickling rainbow of July.”

—*Sea-Shore*

'The hidden-working Builder spy,  
Who builds yet makes no chips, no din,  
With hammer soft as snow-flake's flight.”

—*Monadnoc*

Damsels of 'Time, the hypocritic Days,  
Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,  
And marching single in an endless file.”

—*Days*

“ (Life) in its highest noon and wantonness  
 Is early frugal like a beggar’s child ;  
 Even in the hot pursuit of the best aims  
 And prizes of ambition, checks its hand,  
 Like Alpine cataracts frozen as they leaped, ”

—*Blight*

“ Lo ! I uncover the land  
 Which I hid of old time in the West,  
 As the sculptor uncovers the statue  
 When he has wrought his best. ”

—*Boston Hymn*

And, though more rarely, an elaborate classical simile after Milton’s or Matthew Arnold’s greets us, as in the following :—

“ And the brains of men thenceforth,  
 In crowded and in still resorts,  
 Team with unwonted thoughts :  
 As, when a shower of meteors  
 Cross the orbit of the earth,  
 And, lit by fringent air,  
 Blaze near and far,  
 Mortals deem the planets bright  
 Have slipped their sacred bars,  
 And the lone seaman all the night  
 Sails, astonished, amid stars. ”

—*Daemonic Love*

Of visualised word-pictures in snapshot sketches,

such as,

“ Grass with green flag half-mast high.”

—*The Humble-Bee*

and

“ noontide twilights which snow makes  
With tempest of the blinding flakes.”

—*The Titmouse*

we have, indeed, not a small number set in the album of the entire volume.

The subtle scrutiny of the spectroscope in Emerson, distinguishable, as Garnett remarks, from the sublime sweep of the telescope in Carlyle, makes the observation of Nature, however sporadic, always as notably sure as it is subtle in this great apostle of Nature-communion. Connected with the use of imagination is the said element, also, of the sense of fact. As to this feature of realism, for Arnold Emerson's poetry lacks sensuousness or the quality of concreteness. But, more properly, Morley is prepared to grant that ‘It is only the great idealists, like Emerson, who take care not to miss the real.’ And Van Dyke goes so far as to concede that ‘For an abstract thinker, he was strangely in love with the concrete facts of life. Idealism in him assumed the form of a vivid illumination of the real.’ One with Wordsworth in

this regard and equally persuaded that, as Lowell says,

‘ Life’s bases rest,  
Beyond the probe of chemic test,’

Emerson, like George Meredith among the English poets, captures the spirit of Science on the imaginative side with little of Wordsworth’s horror at the impious outrage of mechanical analytics upon holy sentiment. Science feeds Emerson’s occult imagination with the evasions of the Infinite Mystery, as it fosters Tennyson’s Larger Hope through the revelations of the Reign of Law. Tennyson, of course, is more thoroughly and sympathetically penetrated by the scientific spirit of the age. Still, at one point, it is the same speech both utter in different accents—Emerson in the poem on *Celestial Love*,

“ The circles of that sea are laws  
Which publish and which hide the cause,”

and Tennyson in the famous words,

‘ Nature half reveals  
And half conceals the soul within.’

Prof. Tyndall, a natural philosopher who was also a poet and who wrote, ‘ Purchased by inspiration,’ in his copy of the Tract on *Nature*—that ‘ most intense and quintessential of all Emerson’s writings,’ in Dr. Garnett’s phrase—Prof. Tyndall

bears free witness to how 'By Emerson scientific conceptions are continually transmuted into the finer forms and warmer hues of an ideal world.' Of this scientific imagination in our Platonist-poet, to whom the phenomena of Nature are but so many adumbrations of ideal truths, apt examples are to be found interspersed all over. Thus run the lines in support of his favourite theory of '*Compensation*' :

" Gauge of more or less through space,  
Electric star or pencil plays,  
The lovely Earth amid the balls  
That hurry through the eternal halls,  
A makeweight flying to the void,  
Supplemental asteroid,  
Or compensatory spark,  
Shoots across the neutral Dark."

And here is the passage in *Woodnotes* beautifully diverting the Nebular Hypothesis to idealistic ends :

" Sweet the genesis of things,  
Of tendencies through endless ages,  
Of star-dust, and star-pilgrimages,  
Of rounded worlds, of space and time,  
Of the old flood's subsiding slime,  
Of chemic matter, force, and form,  
Of poles and powers, cold, wet, and warm :  
The rushing metamorphosis,  
Dissolving all that fixture is,  
Melts things that be to things that seem,  
And solid nature to a dream."

Once more, we have the long-continued version of the story of Evolution as outlined in the poem on *Wealth* beginning with the lines,

“ Who shall tell what did befall,  
Far away in time, when once,  
Over the lifeless ball,  
Hung idle stars and suns ?”

The anatomical evidence of gradual development was assumed by Emerson to have sufficiently established the doctrine of Evolution. And with its drift coincided all his teaching as to the inter-relation, nay, the identity between spiritual processes and the workings of Nature, as witness the couplet in the motto verses introducing the Tract on *Nature*—

“ Striving to be man, the worm  
Mounts through all the spires of form.”

“ It is,” repeats the Essay on the same subject, “ a long way from 'granite to the oyster, farther yet to Plato, and the preaching of the immortality of the soul. Yet, all must come, as surely as the first atom has two sides.” Again, as notes the general enunciation in the Essay on *Fate*, “ No statement of the universe can have any soundness which does not admit its ascending effort.” Thus Emerson's imaginative discernment in this regard anticipated Darwin's epoch-making discovery by quite a score of years. And this was done in a

form far bolder and broader and in terms of an idealism singularly complete and imperious. Hence Garnett : ' He fills the place which Goethe's death had left void, divining the secrets of Nature by his instincts of beauty and religion. The gates of the temple of modern science turn upon the two main hinges of his thought—real unity in seeming multiplicity; immanent, not external power.'

The strength (with its source) as well as the weakness (with its effect) of Emerson's imagination are found admirably defined in a recent issue of *The Times Literary Supplement*. ' The starry remoteness of his standpoint,' it writes, ' gave him also what as an artist his genius most needed, scope for his imagination.....He was ready, like Don Quixote, to follow the promptings of this faculty on any strange enterprise or intellectual adventure. But his imagination, though free and bold as Blake's, was not, like Blake's, creative ; and for this reason he never achieved the artistic success which the rareness and quality of his gifts would have seemed to promise. His genius, his imagination, rarely embodied itself in perfect form and shape, but remains diffused rather through his writings in a kind of radiance and in the richness and shimmer of texture which gives his prose such a curious distinction.'

Next, about Emerson's feeling. Even those



whose tastes are for greater intellectual severity or a more logical order of mind may not grudge this noble prophet of idealism the character of an artist in emotion. Everything he touches he interprets through his own temperament. His work is lit by a steady glow of the all-pervasive element of optimism generated in his idealistic soul; and optimism is ever the fruitful mother of passion. This passion in him, it is true, is compounded with, and coloured by, a large element of quiet brooding and wise passiveness, what we in our country denote by the hallowed word '*tapas*.' Hence, the style, like the man—the style, in fact, is the man—comes to be agleam with the extended but subdued heat and light of live embers. How else are we to understand, for one thing, the heart-vibrations of the numerous body of hearers, readers and pilgrims amongst whose enthusiastic tributes of gratitude for the converted life the one from Lowell is only the most eloquent? How else, also, to explain the equally wide scope found in the philosophical and in the elegiac or lyrical productions for the pervasion of feeling, limited though, as it needs must be, by the nature of the theme? Emerson, no doubt, seldom rises to the tempestuous levels of impassioned fervour, being, indeed, as John Morley calls him, 'one of the few moral reformers whose mission lay in calming men rather than in rousing them, and in the inoculation of serenity rather than in the spread of excitement.'

Nevertheless, the felt mystery of the World Whole fills him full with what Clifford, the scientific thinker, called 'cosmic emotion.' Like the Æolian wind-harp celebrated by himself in *May-Day*, his own heart "trembles to the cosmic breath." And if the energy of his emotion is not that of the lightning flash, it is at least like star-light, steady and serene, mild and mellowed. To apply to it his own words from *Monadnoc*,

"Of the same stuff, and so allayed,  
As that whereof the sun is made,"

it, at any rate, is

"of the fibre. quick and strong,  
Whose throbs are love, whose thrills are song."

Why, did not Carlyle write to him in so many words, 'You do not fall upon me like radiant summer rainbows, like floods of sunlight, but with thin piercing radiances which affect me like the light of the stars.'?

This, perhaps, is partly due even to his characteristic austerity of thought, which is a real trait in him despite the absence of all formalism of treatment, as well as to the chill radiance of those starry spaces where his spirit habitually dwells. May be, the same circumstance accounts also for the general repression of humour in the *Essays* as well as in the *Poems* with the exception of the dry sarcasm

of the Romany Girl's flings at civilised fopperies and the somewhat genial sallies about the merry holiday-makers in *The Adirondacs*. We say only 'repression of humour.' For, so far as the Lectures are concerned, Lowell's personal knowledge does testify to some keener flashes of it which always played about the horizon of his mind. This it was that, in Prof. B. Wendell's words,<sup>1</sup> 'prevented him from over-estimating himself and compelled him, when dealing with phenomena, to recognise their relative practical value.' He 'hitched his waggon to star after star, but never really confused the stars with the waggon.' Notice, for instance, the delightful account of the queer oddities of some Transcendentalist folk in the address on *New England Reformers*. Garnett, again, 'while allowing him a vein of epigrammatic humour,' finds his mental constitution insensible to the glorious mirth of an Aristophanes or a Dickens. On the other hand, *The Times Literary Correspondent* quoted above paints him as 'ironic and sometimes as biting and cynical as Voltaire or Swift' but rightly relieves the picture with the added touch that 'His was a much more kindly spirit; his disillusion, his cynical observation, is tempered by a quaint and friendly humour; and although he found that there was a crack in everything God had made and some foible in

<sup>1</sup> *A Literary History of America*

every man, however holy, he put his conclusions in terms with so much mild humanity in their daring that they seem rather to add to the gaiety than to the sadness of the human spectacle.' At least, in the comparison with Carlyle, Hutton speaks the truth when he says, 'Emerson's humour was a much less profound constituent of his character than Carlyle's.'

While it is too much to decry them as all too coldly intellectual, the fact may be granted that the poems uplift the soul more than they melt the heart. They are, indeed, more supernal than sympathetic; or, as Morley puts it in his inimitable way, 'too naked, unrelated and cosmic, too little clad with the vesture of human associations.' Emerson, then, is far removed from those blessed masters of art to whom it is given to both 'dulcify and sublime.' Here, again, he sails in the same boat with Wordsworth, unquestionably the greater artist.

Then, as to Emerson's insight. This constitutes, beyond dispute, his most pre-eminent gift, the very soul of his genius. It lies right at the core of all his intuitional philosophy, thus marking him off from a host of other poets prettier and more pleasurable. Its consideration may properly be postponed to the succeeding chapters on the man and his mind.

A few words must now be given to one or two

defects, admittedly real and organic, which, more than any others, go to discount the total value of Emerson's literary craftsmanship.

The first defect common to all his work, with the necessary exception of some of the shorter poems, is the absence of what Matthew Arnold finely designates as the requisite wholeness of good tissue in the evolution of style. The result is—abrupt transitions and disjointed collocations with little progression in the skilful arrangement of ideas and words, arising from the unphilosophical method or want of method of our good philosopher. Carlyle, with his more powerful style but not more philosophical system and with his immeasurable superiority (as pointed out by Morley) ‘in wit, humour, pathos, penetration, poetic grandeur and fervid sublimity of imagination’ and yet with his equally immeasurable inferiority ‘in high and transparent sanity,’ shows more of Nature's fusing art in his continued thunder-clap than Emerson in his broken lightning-flashes. We refer here to the latter's detached series of brilliant observations in isolated sentences of noble eloquence, homely elevation, natural freshness and quiet enthusiasm. Emerson himself owns to an inherent drawback when he tells of his “formidable tendency to the lapidary style.” “I build my house of boulders.” ‘Can you tell me,’ asked one of his auditors, while Emerson was lecturing, ‘what connection there is between that sentence and the one that

went before and what connection it all has with Plato?' "None, my friend, save in God!" And Emerson the writer is not wide apart from Emerson the lecturer (or preacher) in this way of thought and expression. Thus it is that in such a conscious and consummate master of diction we meet with the striking phenomenon, observed by Prof. Trent, that, while 'few writers have surpassed him in the ability to compose a pregnant sentence,' 'he was rarely able to evolve a paragraph, much more a whole essay, in a masterly or even in a workmanlike fashion.' Of this lack of continuity, Matthew Arnold specifies *May-Day*, among the poems, as a marked instance with its otherwise exquisite graces of chasteness, clearness and cadence reminiscent of Gray as in the passage,

" And ever when the happy child  
 In May beholds the blooming wild,  
 And hears in heaven the bluebird sing,  
 'Onward,' he cries, 'your baskets bring,—  
 In the next field is air more mild,  
 And o'er yon hazy crest is Eden's balmier  
 Spring.' "

From the same poem, too, as we may note here, the proneness 'to jargon, to bathos, to lapses of taste,' is exemplified by Prof. Trent in the

following lines, ' which with better handling might have been worthy of their substance ' :—

“ As we thaw frozen flesh with snow.  
So Spring will not, foolish fond,  
Mix polar night with tropic glow.  
Nor cloy us with unshaded sun,  
Nor wanton skip with bacchic dance,  
But she has the temperance  
Of the gods. whereof she is one.”

Obviously, the kind of mishandling referred to consists in what Hutton complains of as ' a cant of scientific symbolism in the language which makes it obscure and affected,' or, as he otherwise puts it, the ' use of imposing scientific terms in a hybrid popular sense which makes them at once pretentious and misleading.'

The second main defect peculiar to the poems and more obtrusively apparent than their other imperfections is that they generally want the full, rich music belonging to the mastership of song. We say only ' generally.' For, no contemner of Emerson's lyrical faculty, with its cramped use of the metrical and other technical resources of the true poet, its wearisome repetition of often faulty ostosyllabic couplets and its sense of uphill straining as distinguished from flight, has overlooked or can overlook altogether how at times it does sing to a very haunting tune. What, for instance,

is left to be desired in this respect in a stanza like—

“ Canst thou copy in verse one chime  
Of the wood-bell's peal and cry,  
Write in a book the morning's prime,  
Or match with words the tender sky? ” <sup>1</sup> ?

Yet, the comparative scarcity of flow or melodious progression is the one weakness on which criticism is unanimous in its comment; although, curiously, Matthew Arnold, whose own muse, by the way, is not without her own share of indifferently tuneful verse, lays no stress upon this most radical of all the shortcomings. At the same time, one cannot be quite certain that the half-frozenness of the instrument has not been at all exaggerated much to the unfair disparagement of many a line and stanza charged with elfin melody. Take for example, the well-known couplet,

“ He builded better than he knew;  
The conscious stone to beauty grew ; ” <sup>2</sup>

or ever the less known distich,

“ The port, well worth the cruise, is near  
And every wave is charmed.” <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *My Garden*

<sup>2</sup> *The Problem*

<sup>3</sup> *Terminus*



The truth seems to be that, just as Emerson's diction, with all its pureness and opulence, sometimes (in Lowell's words) 'mistakes the queer for the original,' and just as his thought, with all its simplicity and sensuousness, delights at times in being (in Prof. Trent's words) 'irritatingly obscure or else uncomfortably profound,' so, too, his music, where it errs, errs with outrageous nonchalance; and we are reminded of Scott's note about Byron 'managing his pen with the careless and negligent ease of a man of quality.' At certain times, Emerson either does not know, or cannot wait to conform to, the laws of harmonious movement and rhymic assonance: and straightway he sets up as a law unto himself. His stilted lines and vicious rhymes, if collected together, would make a perhaps not uninteresting and unprofitable study by themselves. They would reveal, no doubt, an incapacity for rhythm, a lack of the musical faculty, confirming the amusing story in the biographies that a single exhibition of Emerson's vocal powers while a boy at singing-school was enough to induce the teacher to forbid his reappearance. They would also show that, in his poetical work, Emerson in America must have followed a method kindred to that of Browning in England, whose theory, as practised particularly in his later poems, was that poetry is valuable only for the statement which it makes and must always be subordinated thereto. This

is a parallelism which holds good with the qualification that, in Emerson's case, the roughness as well as the toughness, the cloudy obscurity as well as the stiff abstruseness, is due more to the stupendous magnitude of the thought and less to wildering outrage upon the rules of syntax, even as, in Blake's, it is still more due to the symbolism of the image. At all events, does not the homage of literature gratefully recognise distinctive sources of genuine delight in the intense soul-experience of Browning as also—aye, even more than—in the extreme sound-sensibility of Tennyson ? This view, indeed, previously adumbrated in the Introduction, establishes one more bond of affinity between Emerson and Wordsworth, with this difference that Emerson has 'the vision' and Wordsworth also 'the faculty divine' of translating the vision into music or shaping it into a very 'palace of art.' In fine, Lowell's account of Emerson the (literary) critic aptly describes also Emerson the poet in the words, 'While no man is so sensitive to what is poetical, few are less sensible than he of what makes a poem. He values the solid meaning of thought above the subtler meaning of style.' Hence it may be that his own verse as a whole appeals more to the thinker than to the lover of poetic form.

Here is Garnett's final verdict: 'As a poet, he is the lovely, wayward child of the American Parnassus, more fascinating and captivating than

his elders and betters, and nearer by many degrees to the central source of inspiration; but beautiful rather than strong, and ever in need of allowance and excuse.' 'What is peculiar to him and an ample recompense for all his defects is the atmosphere of diffused beauty in which his works lie bathed.' 'Rather a votary of the beautiful than an artist.' And Lowell, if he feels that 'The artistic range of Emerson is narrow,' also finds that 'there is no man to whom our æsthetic culture owes so much.' Two other opinions are worth recording. One is that of Hutton: 'Carlyle's verse is like the heavy rumble of a van without springs; Emerson's, which now and then reaches something of the sweetness of poetry, much more often reminds one of the attempts of a sorceress to induce in herself the ecstasy which will not spontaneously visit her.' And the other is that of Augustine Birrell: 'Great poetry it may not be, but it has the happy knack of slipping in between our fancies and of clinging like ivy to the masonry of the thought-structure beneath which each one of us has his dwelling.' To say, then, that Emerson is a poet greater than his poems is not a mere paradox beside the mark.

Lastly, a word about the merits and the chances of immortality of particular poems covering the entire gamut of interest from the simplest as in Burns or Longfellow to the profoundest as in Wordsworth or Browning. Personal

predilections in such matters always take a wide range. But there are some happy coincidences of preference in the present case. Among the critics, Morley prizes, foremost of all, the *Threnody* as 'a beautiful and impressive lament' and, next, *Musketaquid*, *The Adirondacs*, *The Snow-Storm* and *The Humble-Bee* as 'pretty and pleasant bits of pastoral.' Van Dyke singles out as 'of beauty unmarred and penetrating truth' *The Rhodora*, *Ode To Beauty*, *Terminus* and *The Concord Ode*, besides the *Threnody* and *The Snow-Storm*, mentioned above. G. J. Schurman (in Chambers's *Cyclopædia of English Literature*) predicts a long lease of appreciated life for *Each and All*, *Woodnotes*, *The Problem* and *The World-Soul* in addition to *The Snow-Storm*, *The Humble-Bee* and *The Rhodora*. Garnett, after a handsome eulogy of the *Threnody* as embodying 'the grief depicted on a Greek funeral monument beautiful in its subdued intensity,' stamps as 'diamonds of the purest water' a few detached stanzas and the pieces on *The Concord Monument*, *The Romany Girl*, *The Rhodora*, *The Two Rivers*, *Days*, *To Eva* and the swan-song, *Terminus*; while he applauds *May-Day* as 'a rapturous and most melodious poem' exhibiting a decided advance on earlier Nature-effusions both in art and in feeling. Henry S. Pancoast, the popular historian of Literatures, English and American, includes in his Study List the *Boston Hymn*,

*Voluntaries*, *The Past*, *Forbearance* and *Waldeinsamkeit* alongside of the common favourites, *Threnody*, *The Concord Ode*, *The Snow-Storm*, *The Humble-Bee*, *The Rhodora* and *Woodnotes*. And, finally, Prof. Trent, after speaking of a few 'perfect pieces such as the clear-cut *Rhodora* and the impressive *Days*,' fixes the merit of the 'varying styles' of Emerson's verse in these discerning and fervent words: 'He is the fearless poet of *The Problem* and *Good-bye, Proud World*; he is the marvellously subtle interpreter of nature as evidenced by *Woodnotes* and *Monadnoc*; he is the tender elegist of the *Dirge* and *Threnody*; he is the wise, mellowed seer of *Terminus*.'

## CHAPTER III

### THE MAN

Preliminary to a brief survey of the teaching conveyed in the poems, whatever their relative value or residual permanence, taken individually and collectively, a rapid glance at the man and the environment becomes essential in order to indicate the reactions of the period and the personality.

Dr. Garnett proclaims Emerson 'the most shining intellectual glory and the most potent intellectual force of a continent.' Even in his own day, it was Carlyle who wrote to Emerson, 'You are a new era, my man, in your huge country.' The most influential, at all events, Emerson is also the most representative and the most original of that interesting group of thinkers and writers whose literary supremacy from about the second quarter of the nineteenth century—the century of American nationality, as the seventeenth was the century of American immigration and the eighteenth of American independence—constitutes one of the most enduring triumphs, as it is one of the most puissant formative forces, of American civilisation.

Emerson, of course, held fast to the originality, and laid the utmost stress upon the independence,

of the individual in such widely-scattered deliverances as "The centuries are conspirators against the sanity and authority of the soul."<sup>1</sup> and "Whoso would be a man must be a non-conformist."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, his own opposing stress on the other half-truth of inextricable indebtedness to the past, as in the dictum, "Every man is a quotation from all his ancestors,"<sup>2</sup> found no dubious fulfilment in Emerson himself, 'the ripened product' (in Morley's delicious words) 'of a genealogical tree that at every stage of its growth had been vivified by Puritan sap.' This Puritan tradition of his lineage—"the Protestantism of the Protestant religion," as Emerson called it—was wedded in him to a poetic temperament. And the issue in the character and work of one of the saintliest among the children of men bloomed bright and benignant with the qualities of grave sincerity, unperturbed composure, strenuous integrity, sturdy self-reliance, serene love of liberty, fearless loyalty to ideals, visionary absorption in supersensuousness and the idealising spirit enamoured of reality. A 'regal,' as Hutton has it, or even imperial majesty and magnanimity of spirit came to combine with a sage-like suavity and serenity of temper. It is no small praise that a personal friend like Lowell bestows upon this

<sup>1</sup> *Self-Reliance*

<sup>2</sup> *Representative Men: Plato*

personality when he says, 'If it was ever questionable whether democracy could develop a gentleman, the problem has been effectively solved at last.'<sup>1</sup> Then, among the strongest outside influences in the making of Emerson were ranged, wide apart in time and space, the poetic thought of Plato and the mystical visions of Swedenborg, the metaphysic of Kant and the romanticism of Goethe from Germany and the eclecticism of Jouffroy and Cousin and the socialism of Fourier from France, as also the deeper elements in the cultures of Ind and Iran. From England itself there streamed into his being the liberating philosophy of Coleridge, which gave an impulse in the transcendental direction to the intellect of his time; the intimate poetry of Wordsworth, which gave the transcendental impulse to the imagination and to the contemplative habit of mind (as Shelley's did to the imagination and the passions); and the stimulating essays of Carlyle, which played like an 'electric battery upon the will.'<sup>2</sup>

Here, before dilating upon its Emersonian developments, we make room, by the way, for a moment's digression into the content and characteristic of Transcendentalism itself in general, that winged thing with a vital power. Garnett defines it briefly as 'the philosophy built on necessary,

<sup>1</sup> *My Study Windows: Thoreau*

<sup>2</sup> Dowden: *Studies in Literature*



universal principles, the primary laws of mind, which are the ground of absolute truth.' And no more comparative exposition of it may be found than in the following beautiful passages from Dowden. 'A word,' he writes, 'like a comet, has a tail as well as a head, or at least a coma as well as a nucleus.' Hence, apart from the 'much vague talk about the Infinite, the Immensities, the Eternal Verities, the Eternal Silences, and what not,' 'which we are bound to recognise, even if we cannot accurately define it,' ... 'the empirical thinker derives all our ideas from experience, some members of the school asserting that it is through the senses alone that we obtain these ideas. The transcendental thinker believes that the mind contributes to its own stores ideas or forms of thought not derived from experience. As to a Divine Being and man's relations with Him, the empirical thinker may be a theist, but he will ordinarily require an apparatus, a mechanism, to connect the Divine Spirit with the spirit of man; the transcendental thinker can with difficulty endure the notion of such a mechanism or apparatus; the natural and the supernatural seem to him to touch, embrace, or interpenetrate one another: in the external world and in his own soul the Divine Presence for ever haunts, startles and waylays him.'

It is due, however, to note that the New England Transcendentalism of the era under consi-

deration was singularly vaster and more vital than one would be led to gather from this general sketch by a savant of literature from the standpoint of thought. Representing as it did a refined blend of English Romanticism, German Internationalism and Oriental Immanentism with American Puritanism, it was a unique combination of two currents, mental as well as spiritual, speculative as well as practical. As Prof. Trent, dissenting from O. B. Frothingham and like historians of the movement, rightly points out in his volume on *American Literature*, it was not 'a phase of the history of philosophy, as in Germany, or merely a phase of the history of literature, as in England. It dominated the actions as well as the thoughts of men. It was a religion, a life.' It distinctly tended to, even where it did not uniformly stand for, a rationalism which discarded all dogmatic authority, an intuitionism which believed in innate ideas of truth and right, an optimism which insisted on the excellence of human nature, an individualism which asserted the individual's power and prerogative of self-realisation, a universalism which inculcated and illustrated the catholic virtue of tolerance, an intellectualism which set great store by culture out of an almost riotous delight in pure literature of the widest range, an idealism which sought for absolute truths behind and beneath the phenomena of things, an immanentism which perceived the

Deity as the Indwelling Presence and also a radicalism which proved its ardour of revolutionary temper in a strenuous struggle to alter the affairs of this world for the better. And as to the dynamic forces that historically favoured this socio-religious evolution, we have them clearly outlined in the following passage, too fine to be passed over, in the standard work above referred to. 'This was possible,' it says, 'because Unitarianism had broken down Calvinistic dogmatism, yet had failed to satisfy the spiritual needs of those of the newer generation who demanded outlets for emotions kindled by the literature of the romantic period. It was possible also because New Englanders were an imaginative people and speculative as well.... It was possible, furthermore, because New Englanders were sincere, courageous, independent, simple in their lives and less hampered by traditions of caste than any European people; indeed, less hampered than their own ancestors had been. Moreover, it was an age of aspiration throughout the world. The railway and other modern inventions seemed to have ushered in a new era of prosperity; schemes of social reform, many of them Utopian in character, were in the air; political revolutions were breaking out. Finally, it was a period of American history in which politics offered no great allurements to young men trained as the best New Englanders were..... Besides, the average American appeared

to be neglecting his manners, his education, his religion, in order to get rich quickly. Speculation in railways, public lands, "wild-cat banks," seemed to have vulgarized the country and thrown it into violent turmoils. By the law of reaction there could have been nothing more natural to a noble-natured, finely trained young New Englander, a scion of decayed but eminently respectable Federalism, than an almost violent recoil upon the inner life, the life of the spirit, as the only sure hope for the regeneration of his beloved country, the only sure refuge for his own soul from the prevailing sordidness and vulgarity of the epoch.'

Now, the three shining spirits of England named above, Emerson saw in the flesh, as he had burned even as a young man with the desire to do, and he held personal converse with them during his pilgrimage to that country. In reinforcement of the serenely and even ecstatically contemplative transcendentalism of Wordsworth, the new transcendentalism of Germany, brought thence into England by Coleridge, serenely philosophical or only calmly argumentative, claimed Emerson, among others, for its own in America in the wake of the intellectual freedom of Unitarianism, which emphasised the need of a generous culture and threw open the doors to foreign literature and thought. Then there went forth two simultaneous thought-movements on opposite shores of the water—the Tractarianism of Oxford under New-

man and the Transcendentalism of Boston under Emerson. They both represented a common escape from the eighteenth century mechanical philosophy of deism with its ethics of 'good sense.' But it was an escape by different modes. The one effected it by appeal to authority, and the other by appeal to a present deity. The one strove to revivify the idea of the Church into an accredited voice, a living witness to the Truth; and the other sought to restore the Temple of the Living God in the soul of man. Both, at the same time, stood out as common enemies to that aspect of Puritanism which (in Dowden's words) 'laboured to effect an irreparable breach between the invisible and the visible, the internal and the external, between body and spirit.' The cramps of Calvinism having been outlived, the New Englander, in a manner possible, perhaps, only in a new country, looked out upon Nature and Man with a new outlook, a new power to feel the spiritual sacredness and beauty of the material world and the infinite worth and dignity of the private man, and a new love of humanity with a democratic feeling aiming at better social systems for the creation and nurture, not of the average good man merely, but of the highest conceivable type of manhood. Thus, 'released from the weight of formalism and asceticism, and, at the same time, quickened and uplifted by influences of a most original and stimulating character, the New Eng-

land mind ceased to expend itself wholly on theology.' ' On one side, the Puritan embargo upon the fine arts was removed which had æsthetically starved the race for five or six generations. And, on the other, the limitations of a traditional education were set aside which, so far as it had indulged itself in speculative philosophy, had treated it as ancillary mostly to theology and sometimes to jurisprudence. Hence, in Emerson we find that the spirit in which he conceived the laws of life, revered them and lived them out was the Puritan spirit elevated, enlarged and beautified by the metamorphic glow of Transcendentalism. This latter, again, in his hands became freed from the aberrations of theory and practice exemplified in *The Dial* and in Brook Farm. "I have to begin with endless disclaimers and explanations," he remarked to his wife in the year of his own famous exposition of the new-old doctrine narrowly "spoken of as a known and fixed element like salt or meal." We call it 'new old,' because that precisely was the light in which he himself embraced the philosophy of appeal from the outer realities of life to the inner, deeper intuitions of the soul and proceeded to set out the historic pageant of its dynamic influence through different epochs. His survey of the past workings of the movement, as sketched in the Lecture of 1842 on

1 Pancoast: *Introduction to American Literature*

*The Transcendentalist*, properly characterised as Emerson's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, approves itself as comprehensive enough save for the curious omission of Plato, one of the master-lights of his own seeing and the foremost, if not the first, among the idealists of the ancient West. "This way of thinking, falling on Roman times, made Stoic philosophers : falling on despotic times, made patriot Catos and Brutuses : falling on superstitious times, made prophets and apostles : on popist-times, made protestants and ascetic monks, preachers of Faith against the preachers of Works : on prelatical times, made Puritans and Quakers ; and falling on Unitarian and commercial times, makes the peculiar shades of Idealism which we know." Emerson's Transcendentalism reflected that side of the movement which in America, to quote Prof. Dowden again, 'took up and carried forward the banner at a time when in England the cause was beginning to be a little discredited by the extending action and influence of positive science.' For his part, he turned to far-reaching account the latest findings of Science by applying them to his doctrine of Transcendentalism—such findings as the infinite permutations of matter in varying chemical forms, the convertibility and indestructibility of force as well as the law of all-round progressive evolution. As Julian Hawthorne pithily observes, 'He looked at modern science broadly and synthetically, catching its drift and its

relations to spiritual life.' And in his hands as its 'acknowledged leader,' Transcendentalism rose, on the one hand, above all combative militancy like Carlyle's against the utilitarianism of the hay-balance or like Browning's against the secularism of the test-tube and, on the other, above all moody self-distrust like Clough's. So far, then, as labels serve any purpose in this case, Emerson stands for us as the epitome of Calvinistic Puritanism humanised into Unitarianism and of Unitarianism celestialised by Transcendentalism. It is, further, his unique service to this cause of Unitarianism, as Garnett points out, 'to kill it as theology and bid it live as literature.'

At the same time, the natural evolution of his genius presents him in the light of a straight-soaring cosmopolitanism bent by the burden of no forms and bounded by the barriers of no sect, school or system. 'The least parochial of Anglo-Saxons,' as he has been called,<sup>1</sup> he is best described in his own words, a man "of all the zones, and countless days."<sup>2</sup> Not a bondman of Time on earth caged within the bars of the passing and the particular, the clannish and the conventional, but, in truth, a free citizen of the unseen Zion of Eternity in the Empyrean of the Spirit is this Emerson, the 'emancipator not of black bodies;

<sup>1</sup> Augustine Birrell: *Essex Hall Lecture*

<sup>2</sup> *Song of Nature*



but of the minds of white men.'<sup>1</sup> Hence it is that, if he is unsystematic, he is so on principle in view of the multiplicity of truth's facets.<sup>2</sup> We recall here his own words, "I am always insincere, as always knowing there are other moods."<sup>3</sup> And 'though his transcendentalism always gave an air of patronage to his manner in speaking of any of the greater religions and made him contemptuous of the pretensions of special access to God, towards man he is always reverent and always reverent, too, in relation to the Divine Mind itself.'<sup>4</sup> Hence, again, it is that his interpretation of life, with its purest and most abiding elements of universal experience, has been adjudged competent to stand good for all times and climes and carry its appeal to all schools of thought and belief. So that the fact that there is no dialectical accent and there will come to be few obsolete turns in the utterance of this free-thinking idealist may, comparatively speaking, obviate the need for any expositor's gloss and comment on those changes of fashion, mental and social, that must divide his generation more and more widely from posterity. Hence, too, it is that Emerson's luminous perceptions—rather,

<sup>1</sup> Augustine Birrell : *Essex Hall Lecture*

<sup>2</sup> Morley : *Critical Miscellanies*

<sup>3</sup> *Essay on Nominalist and Realist*

<sup>4</sup> Hutton : *Brief Literary Criticisms*

intuitions comprehending without effort large and lofty regions of thought and perception—exhibiting, for one thing, many striking points of contact with the higher zones of ancient Hindu consciousness. Enough will be seen and said later in the study of the poems to satisfy ourselves how deeply saturated and how opulently stored his mind was, not only with the mysticism of the Sufis—he has, in his *Letters and Social Aims*, a whole discourse separately on ‘Persian Poetry,’ in which he is thoroughly at home—but also with the Vedantic lore of the Hindus. How frequently the *Bhagavad-gita* and the *Vishnu Purana*, in particular, are laid under contribution for quotations throughout his pages! His *Journals* record, in so many words, his large and liberal-minded conviction that “An obscure and slender thread of truth runs through all mythologies and this might lead to the highest regions of philosophy.” We have, besides, his own frank acknowledgment made with profound insight in the words, “Europe has always owed to Oriental genius its divine impulses.” His address on *Progress of Culture* alludes to “the grand scriptures, only recently known to the Western nations, of the Indian Vedas, the Institutes of Manu, the Puranas, the poems of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.” No doubt, it is only the blindness of perverse national vanity in us, Indians, that can fail to see in Emerson and his forceful insistence on

moral selfhood much that must provide a wholesome corrective and complement to our own tendencies to nerveless fatalism. Yet, his hold upon intuitive apprehension and not logical ratiocination as the organ of final realisation ; his sense of thought or spirit and not matter as true reality ; his consciousness of the unity of Nature and the immanence of the Spirit ; his recognition of the finite as a moment in the progressive self-manifestation of the Infinite ; his demur to the concept of the personality, by way of affirmation, not of the impersonality, but of the omnipersonality or superpersonality, of the Supreme Being of infinite consciousness, ‘ *Purusham mahantam*’ ; his discontent with anything short of the One and the Whole ; and the very self-discipline of his life in the austerities of what he calls

“A single speech  
And a thousand silences”<sup>1</sup>

—these, in the richness of their implications, may well and truly support the claim that Emerson is an Indian born out of clime, as Keats the poet has been quaintly styled an Elizabethan born out of date. In fact, Henry Van Dyke does suggestively speak of Emerson, in so many words, as ‘an intellectual Brahmin.’ Anywise, such is the comprehensive, cosmic sweep of his capacious genius

<sup>1</sup> *Merops*

that, as gratefully acknowledged by him in the lines on *Musketaquid*,

“ The partial wood-gods overpaid my love,

... ..

Made moon and planets parties to their bond,

And through my rock-like, solitary wont

Shot million rays of thought and tenderness.”

And these “ million rays of thought and tenderness ” —how faithfully and how fruitfully he has, in his turn, transmitted them to many in his day and after, conspicuous in the fields of mental activity! It was Dean Stanley who, recounting his American impressions, said he had heard many preachers in that land but invariably found the speaker to be one and the same, to wit, Emerson. Augustine Birrell, again, did not overstate the truth when, addressing the British and Foreign Unitarian Association in 1903 at the centenary celebrations of Emerson’s birth, he referred to ‘ those slender, much loved volumes some of you know better than you do your Bibles.’ These casual observations may perhaps be accepted as a sufficient index to the seer’s already established ascendancy over the realm of the modern mind and spirit, not to speak of the increasing allegiance he may elicit hereafter like his own Cromwell,

“ Obeying time, the last to own

The genius from its cloudy throne.” <sup>1</sup>

In bare justice, however, to the opposition party, the story had better be retailed, also, how, once in a friendly talk on topics literary and spiritual, an Evangelical missionary out here in India, on being asked for the loan of a book by or on Emerson, at first got flushed with warm expectations of a promising candidate for conversion interested in 'immersion,' the baptismal rite, and as it had to be explained that the subject of the enquiry was only 'Emerson,' the American writer, just reeled off the ready answer, 'Oh, we don't keep such books.' So, perhaps, he thought to give an eternal quietus to the overbaleful *Divinity School Address* and its addle-headed, perverse-minded perpetrator ! Letting alone such specimens of the theological ostrich, no less inevitable and delightful in every fold than the 'harmless necessary cat' in every home, we fall back upon the verdict of one like Lowell, who claims for Emerson that in him 'the Puritanism that made New England what it is, and is destined to make America what it should be, found its voice.'" Verily, it is a singular and far-extended charm that belongs to Emerson. And it belongs to him in its entirety by virtue of the man and the writer, the two going together and elucidating each the other. If any dividing-line is to be drawn at all, it must be as drawn by Prof. Bliss

Perry : ' Emerson was a man before he was a writer and although he was a writer.' <sup>1</sup> In fine, few have so closely followed Milton's precept that the poet's life should first be a poem. And well may Emerson share with Milton himself the worthy tribute paid by Wordsworth—

Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart :  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea,  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free :  
So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
In cheerful godliness ; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.'

<sup>1</sup> *Emerson Today*

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SEER

And now for the end of the first instalment of a sweetly tiresome task. No elaborate or systematic review or even *résumé* of the ideas of Emerson can easily fall within the scope of this short, concluding chapter under Part I, but only a bird's eye view of some outstanding reflections with which we sit to, or rise from, a study of the poems. The anticipation of any later extracts to be found under Part II must needs be avoided here as far as may be. Considerations of space must also forbid the pleasure of extended excursions into the region of the prose writings in search of parallelisms. But this is a limitation which need not seriously affect the view-point in relation to a teacher whose theme is substantially the same whether in the poems or in the essays.

Emerson's relation to us, as defined by Matthew Arnold, is that of a friend and aider, like Marcus Aurelius, of those who would live in the spirit—a relation, he adds, of even superior importance to that of a great poet, a great writer, a great philosophy-maker. And, to be sure, no higher tribute was ever paid to Emerson than when, in

the *Discourses in America*, the same authority pronounced his essays at any rate the most important work done in prose, side by side with Wordsworth's poetry, the most important thing done in verse, in the whole of the nineteenth century. In a sonnet written earlier on the *Essays*, Arnold had also expressed himself thus :

‘ A voice oracular hath peal’d today,  
Today a hero’s banner is unfurled,  
Hast thou no lips for welcome ?’

A pronouncement and a challenge this which afterwards met with Hutton’s qualified acceptance in the words, ‘ The first line at least was true, whatever may be said of the second. No man has compressed more authoritative insight into his sentences than Emerson ;’ and this, while ‘ he is never aggressive.’<sup>1</sup> And, summing up the message of the ‘ voice oracular,’ the sonnet had continued,

‘ Yet the will is free ;  
Strong is the soul, and wise, and beautiful ;  
The seeds of godlike power in us still ;  
Gods are we, bards, saints, heroes, if we will !’

Here, then, is a summary of ‘ the Gospel according to Emerson,’ true and telling within its compass.

<sup>1</sup> *Brief Literary Criticisms*



Even the wider range of the *Discourses in America* does not go far beyond a fine exposition and vindication of the Emersonian ethic of self-reliance in the individual and self-realisation in and through society, an endogenous process of growth rooted in the vital potency of character and flowering into a happy optimism of temper. Hence, as we may venture to observe, this virtual reduction of 'life in the spirit' into little more than 'morality touched with emotion' discloses one aspect of the not surprising inadequacy of Arnold's apprehension of Emerson on the ontological side, all his glowing enthusiasm for him notwithstanding. Equally noticeable and more strange, too, in the great expositor of Wordsworth and his 'healing power' is the absence of all allusion to the faculty of naturalistic interpretation or what is called natural magic which is so peculiar to, and paramount in, Emerson. Maybe the entire overlooking, on Matthew Arnold's part, of the speciality of Emerson's relation to Nature is in a way traceable to this, that, as pointed out by Stopford Brooke, except in rare moods of reversion to Wordsworth, humanising the things seen and veiling them with a sentiment of their own, Matthew Arnold's own view of Nature is no philosophic view spiritualising her as but the form of Thought or Love and believing that she is alive or indwelt by living beings, but the scientific view of matter in motion taking an inconceivable variety

of forms and yet always in its variety acting rigidly according to Law. Thus, what appears as a constitutional pose in Emerson is only an occasional attitude in Arnold, as in the lines in *Parting*—

‘ Blow, ye winds ! lift me with you ;  
I come to the wild,  
Fold closely, O Nature !  
Thine arms round thy child.

‘ To thee only God granted  
A heart ever new :  
To all always open ;  
To all always true.

‘ Ah ! calm me ! restore me !  
And dry up my tears  
On thy high mountain-platforms,  
Where Morn first appears.’

The resultant difference in outlook is well brought out in the contrast drawn in one word by Hutton : ‘ Where Wordsworth said ‘ rejoice,’ Mr. Arnold says ‘ endure.’ ’<sup>1</sup> And naturally, as we may conclude, Emerson’s nearness to Wordsworth only outdistanced Arnold to that extent from the proper perspective.

Likewise, with little reference to Emerson’s mystic absorption in Nature and in the Universal Spirit, of which Nature is the incarnation, John Morley’s appreciation in the *Critical Miscellanies*

<sup>1</sup> *Brief Literary Criticisms : The Poetic Place of Matthew Arnold*

narrows down to the meed due to Emerson's standing merely as ' a moral reformer ' and ethical idealist. The Spirit in Nature, the Spirit in the Self, the Spirit in Society—none of these, however, is ignored in Emerson's own philosophy, though, perhaps, the degrees of their relative emphasis hardly admit of distinct reading.

All in all, Emerson is what he is, a friend and aider of life in the spirit, even because, above all things, he is a seer, a spiritual seer, an inspired and therefore inspiring mystic. This, evidently is Thayer's meaning when, in words quoted with approval by Garnett, he declares, ' Marcus Aurelius was not a man possessed, Emerson was,' and thereby revises the comparison instituted by Matthew Arnold and more recently reaffirmed by Prof. Trent, who, while prepared to call Emerson a philosopher only in the sense that Marcus Aurelius may be so called, would yet prefer to rank them both with the moralists, the great ethical stimulators. But what matters it, in truth ? For, as Joseph Forster, the enthusiastic admirer of ' the spiritual and heaven-scaling genius of the American Plato,' roundly observes in his appreciative little book on *Four Great Teachers*, ' Emerson taught no exact system of philosophy, thank heaven ! But if philosophy means a love of wisdom, he was a philosopher.' In that capacity, but as defined (or redefined) above, it is that Emerson feeds and fosters the higher instincts and the deeper

insights which make our better self. As one pre-eminent in his own category of

“ the sons of intellect,  
And the souls of ample fate,  
Who the Future's gates unbar,  
Minions of the Morning Star,”<sup>1</sup>

he becomes a revealer of things lovely and of good report, even as he sees and makes others see, hears and makes others hear. So that he speaks, not as one who examines and expounds, but as one who visions and witnesses, his words being his own vision made visible to us. His poetry, it has been said, is not so much made as it is received and retold: it is just the breath of the Over-soul. Like A' Keimpis, he wrote just when the mood seized him. Rather, to quote Joseph Forster again, ‘ He looked into his heart and wrote. But he was always, by study and observation, enriching his heart and brain.’ None believed more firmly in inspiration in its most natural, primitive state or echoed more joyously the thanksgiving of the Founder of Christianity that ‘Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.’ At the same time, none believed more freely in culture in its most liberal sense or assimilated more ardently the maxim of the Prophet of Islam that ‘ The ink of the scholar is more precious than the blood of the martyr.’

<sup>1</sup> *Daemonic Love*

What type of mystic seer have we, then, in Emerson ? It must be a rather difficult matter to determine whether, according to Miss Spurgeon's classification in the excellent Cambridge Manual on *Mysticism in English Literature*, Emerson stands outside any of her four groups, namely, Nature Mystics like Henry Vaughan and Wordsworth ; Philosophical Mystics like Donne and Tennyson among poets and Burke, Coleridge and Carlyle among prose-writers ; Love and Beauty Mystics like Shelley, Rossetti, Browning, Coventry Patmore and Keats ; and, lastly, Devotional and Religious Mystics like Herbert, Blake and Francis Thompson. Every true poet being the intuitive seer and spontaneous singer of some vision, in the case of certain at least among those just named, one may be positive about the colour, contour and content of the vision and say that Wordsworth, for instance, visions and voices Life in the universe, Shelley Beauty, Tennyson Law, and Browning Love. Emerson's prism has sides open to all these beams.

And how ? Life, enigmatic-looking, was to him, not a problem of perplexity, but a voyage of wonderment—a grand and glorious adventure of romance, to be followed with gaiety and yet with gravity of spirit in the pursuit of a high and noble emprise. Death, maniac-looking, was to him, not a doom of dissolution, but, as it has been called with the truth of true poetry, ‘ a swift dream out of which one awakes with reality of life, the flight

of a bird through an arch of gloom into the sunshine beyond,'<sup>1</sup> the latter image reminding us of Emerson's own description of the fear involved as "the fear of the young bird to trust its own wings."<sup>2</sup> Law, relentless-looking, he praised as the trustworthy process of a Universal, Immutable Will. Art, original-looking, he honoured as subservient copartnership in the Divine, Creative Power. Nature, solid-seeming, he glorified as the translucent symbol of the One Spiritual Presence. Man, independent-seeming, he revered as the self-sundered manifestation of the Supreme, Self-conscious Personality. Society, mechanical-seeming, he venerated as the organic embodiment of Eternal, Progressive Providence. And Religion, expedient-seeming, he adored as the upholding pillar of

" the great world's altar-stairs  
That slope thro' darkness up to God."

Among life's pursuits and possessions, he valued Culture in the scholar as "the world's eye and the world's heart."<sup>3</sup> He was enamoured of Beauty, not as the exhibition of geometrical symmetry and proportion in the relations and forms of colour or amplitude, but as the very shine and sheen of the Eternal Self, an unveiling of the face of the First and Only Fair, a revelation

<sup>1</sup> Stopford Brooke: Sermon on *The Pattern on the Mount*

<sup>2</sup> Discourse on *Immortality*, "the most practical of doctrines"

<sup>3</sup> *The American Scholar*



In all this outlook beholding Nature and Man face to face and not merely through the medium of convention and tradition, Emerson fixed his gaze upon the world as “the externisation of the soul,” upon spirit as the all-inclusive reality of which man thinking is a reflex, and upon intuition as the receptiveness of the human mind to communications from the Divine.

The economy of his ‘ontocentric’ system—if that term, ‘system,’ could be applied to the scintillations of his consciousness—involved a particular theory of Nature and provided a specific function for her in that “upbuilding of a man” which he held to be “the main enterprise of the world for splendour, for extent.”<sup>1</sup> Nature, he felt and he found, was unitive and alive, congenial and sympathetic, complementary and corrective, communicative and instructive, ministrant and disciplinary—at once man’s nurse, governess and high-priestess through life.

“Complement of human kind,  
Having us at vantage still,  
Our sumptuous indigence,  
O barren mound, thy plenties fill !”

—so ran his apostrophe to Monadnoc. The song of his Titmouse to him was :

“Live out of doors,  
In the great woods, on prairie floors.”

<sup>1</sup> Tract on *Nature*



Of himself he said, " I expand and live in the warm day like corn and melons." <sup>1</sup> His mind he held always as a crystal mirror to the beauty and benignity of Nature. He sensed life in hills and heaths, in woods and waters. He heard poetic rhyme in the throbs of the earth and epic chime in the tides of the sea. From the " Delphian chord " of " the wind-harp lone " he learnt

" How Nature to the soul is moored " <sup>2</sup>

—a lesson it " best can teach," he said,

" If once again that silent string,

As erst it wont, would thrill and ring. " <sup>3</sup>

From the heights of his mystic experience he could shout forth,

" There's a melody born of melody,

Which melts the world into a sea." <sup>4</sup>

and, again, with a more than Shelleyan touch,

" The spiritual stars rise nightly, shedding down

A private beam into each several heart." <sup>5</sup>

As in the case of the Shepherd of King Admetus in Lowell's poem,

' It seemed the loveliness of things

Did teach him all their use ;

<sup>1</sup> *Tract on Nature*

<sup>2</sup> *May-Day*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *Fate*

<sup>5</sup> *The Adirondacs*

For, in mere weeds, and stones, and springs,  
He found a healing power profuse."

Such healing power this (shall we say ?) as, even in our commonplace lives of settled prose, sometimes and somewhat steals into the bruised heart when haply the ear is ravished with the *Te Deums* trilled, amidst their tanglewood tales, by the unseen choristers in Nature's cathedral; or when the eye is feasted upon emerald Edens decked amidst their incense-laden zephyrs, from the unspent wardrobes of Nature's loom; or, again, when the body itself is bathed in the baptismal star-light streaming down, amidst their night-embosomed stillness, from the depths of the blue font high up in Nature's vault. Emerson's meditations on natural processes moulded his conclusions on spiritual conditions. One single instance may perhaps suffice as an illustration. If Carlyle had his philosophy of clothes with its key-note of unending renovation, Emerson had his own philosophy of circles with its key-note of unerring compensation as well as unlimited expansion. A circle always returns to the point where it began. So, "Every excess causes a defect; every defect an excess. Every sweet has its sour; every evil its good." "Things refuse to be mismanaged long." "The world, like a multiplication-table, turn it how you will, balances itself." Also, as it is true that around every circle another

can be drawn, so "The life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the counterpoise of physical properties and the certainty of ethical effects furnished to him the objective image of, and warrant for, the spiritual equilibrium of the universe in the "trembling balance"<sup>2</sup> of Fate, as mathematical expansion afforded the promise and pledge of spiritual expansion. And it entrenched him deep behind that invincible optimism by which he gallantly held the citadel of the faith that

"There's no god dare wrong a worm";<sup>3</sup>

"And every man, in love or pride,  
Of his fate is never wide";<sup>4</sup>

and

"That Night or Day, that Love or Crime  
Leads all souls to the Good."<sup>5</sup>

In view, then, of his close readings from Nature and her constant revelations to him at first-hand, it will not be wide of the mark to place Emerson among the Nature Mystics, if he must be classed under any one single group. And here he stands nearest of kin to Wordsworth, distinguished from him by this contrast that, while Wordsworth sees

<sup>1</sup> *Essay on Circles*

<sup>2</sup> *Compensation—I*

<sup>3</sup> *Compensation—II*

<sup>4</sup> *Nemesis*

<sup>5</sup> *The Park*

more into ' the life of things ' and beholds a feeling personality in the Nature-Spirit and draws therefrom ' more joy and consolation ' under

' the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,"<sup>1</sup>

Emerson strikes more upon " the unity of things" and a fusing immanence through the Nature-Spirit and derives therefrom more "power" over, and "endurance" against,

" the waves hated,  
Accursed, adored,  
The waves of mutation."<sup>2</sup>

On this point, Dr. Garnett goes so far as to hold that the elemental genius of Emerson's verse 'stands in a closer relation to Nature than that of almost any other poet. He has an unique power of making us participate in the life of Nature as it is in Nature herself, not, as Wordsworth gives it, blended with the feelings or at least coloured by the contemplations of humanity. Such intimacy with Nature has sometimes all the effect of magic; there are moments and moods in which Emerson seems to have as far out-flown Wordsworth as he outflew Thomson and Collins.'

Next, as to Emerson's theory of Man—Man the subject and thinker, the doer and reformer,

<sup>1</sup> *On revisiting the Wye above Tintern Abbey*

<sup>2</sup> *Illusions*

the believer and revealer. However much Nature would appear to be all in all for Emerson to the exclusion of Society, it is, he recognises, only of the soul that she lends herself to be, as it were, a metaphor in mosaic mould, a parable in picture-writing. Referring to this subject of Emerson's germinal ideas about Man in relation to Nature and God, Professors Trent and Erskine state as follows in their recent little book on *Great Writers of America* for the Home University Library : ' Nature teaches us that her life is in the mind of man ; perhaps that is all the life she has. She teaches us to understand God : but what if she is only God's *process* of teaching us, and does not exist outside the process ? The more we understand her, the less real she seems and the more real seem the laws she has taught. If nature is our language, the means of externalising our thought, may she not be the externalisation of divine thought in us, having no other existence except as she is put forth through us ? ' We have here a neat and concise presentation of the philosophical position of Emerson, finding, on the one side, in man's self the base and background of all Nature's life, light and language, and merging, on the other, even man's self in the One, Infinite Self of the Supreme. The forward footprints in this progression of idealism may be closely marked in the subjoined propositions, all from the Tract on *Nature*. First,

“ Nature always wears the colours of the spirit.” Next, “ Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.” And lastly, “ Idealism sees the world in God. It beholds the whole circle of persons and things, of actions and events, of country and religion, not as painfully accumulated, atom after atom, act after act, in an aged creeping Past, but as one vast picture, which God paints on the instant eternity, for the contemplation of the soul.” Or, as this same eucharistic experience is forecasted in Carlyle’s earlier *Sartor*, ‘ Think well, thou wilt find that space is but a mode of our human sense, so likewise Time; there is no space and no Time. We are—we know not what;—light sparks floating in the æther of Deity! So that this so solid-seeming world, after all, were but an air image, our Me the only reality : and nature, with its thousandfold production and destruction, but the reflex of our inward Force, “ the phantasy of our Dream;” or what the Earth-Spirit in *Faust* names it, *the living visible garment of God*. As such, well may their community of belief in this one vital doctrine, if nought else, suggest the exclamation—

Three Seers, in three distant places born,  
Weimar, Chelsea, and Concord did adorn ;

—with also, if you will, the further sequel—

‘ The first in loftiness of thought surpass’d,  
The next in majesty, in both the last.  
The force of Nature could no further go ;  
To make a third, she join’d the former two.’

Blown aloft by the reeling blast of speculative reason, Emerson’s idealism is sometimes borne up to that point of absolute monism at which not the outer world alone but the inner personality also appears as but a transitory organ, a passing mood, of the all-subsuming Divine Entity. But, throughout, the rudder of robust practical reason veers him round to the haven of an irreducible ethical selfhood. Thus safeguarded stands the independence and inviolability, and thus strengthened the dignity and self-sufficiency, of every human soul ; so much so that the best teachers, he holds, can only provoke it to self-expression and self expansion. In Henry Van Dyke’s figure, ‘ All through his life, he navigated the Transcendental sea, piloted by a clear moral sense, warned off the rocks by a saving grace of humour, and kept from capsizing by a good ballast of New England prudence.’ Further, even in the name of ‘ pure reason ’ or the understanding, though less clearly so than of ‘ practical reason ’ or conscience—and, in fact, more by force of intuition than of intellection—this very Ariel of philosophy makes it, after all, anything but safe to commit him to the

exclusive position of an out and out subjective idealism. In the first place, as to the external world, we have his own express caution in the tender, touching words: "But I own there is something ungrateful in expanding too curiously the particulars of the general proposition...I have no hostility to nature but a child's love to it... I do not wish to fling stones at my beautiful mother, nor soil my gentle nest. I only wish to indicate the true position of nature in regard to man, wherein to establish man, all right education tends." In the second place, as to the personal self, we have also the more than underlying predication of an indissoluble granite speck, so to speak, of a subject-centre in the finite ego. That is to say, the self in man is indissoluble only by virtue of the inherent purpose of the Absolute Divine; so that Omnipotence itself could no more annihilate this partial reproduction of itself. And it is finite only as eternally and even consciously endued with infinite potentiality, inasmuch as the consciousness of any limitation must imply the transcendence of it and a merely finite being would not know itself to be finite. As in the theosophy of the *Upanishads* as clarified, say, in the Narada-Sanathkumara, the Indra-Prajapathi and the Indra-Prathardana colloquies of the *Chandogya* and the *Kaushitaki*, so, too, in the subjective idealism of Emerson as outlined above, there is enough to show up the



thinness of his so-called pantheistic monism. His cognition of the unity of all things in an undivided consciousness does affirm, and not annul, the contradistinction and the correlativity between both the objective and the subjective aspects of Reality. This is how he puts it in the *Essay on Nominalist and Realist* : "The end and the means, the gamester and the game,—life is made up of the intermixture and reaction of these two amicable powers, whose marriage appears beforehand monstrous, as each denies and tends to abolish the other... Things are, and are not, at the same time;—and the like. All the universe over there is but one thing, this old Two-Face, creator-creature, mind-matter, right-wrong, of which any proposition may be affirmed or denied." So that, in one word, to this modern seer, as to the ancient *rishi*, the *Nirgunabrahman* of the *swaroopalakshanas* is ever one with the *Saguneswara* of the *thatasthalakshanas*—no barren, abstract Universal excluding the differences of the universe and negating the relations of life.

Judged, accordingly, in its entirety as a system of thought with reference to the natural and the human, the metaphysical and the moral, Emerson's doctrine of Immanence, far from involving the dissolution of freewill and moral strife, only provides the highest inspiration for an endless endeavour after perfection through goodness and righteousness.

“ Whilst upper life the slender rill  
Of human sense doth overfill,”

as observed at the close of the poem on *Art*,  
it is emphasised in that on *Astraea* that

“ Yet shine forever virgin minds,

...                      ...                      ...

Rendering to a curious eye

The durance of a granite ledge

To those who gaze from the sea's edge.”

And of his sublimest moral idealism the source  
lies in his grip of this profoundest natural law in  
the spiritual world, that

“ Pure by impure is not seen.”<sup>1</sup>

Speaking of Emerson's Immanentism. it must  
be noted that, like the Transcendentalist that he  
was, he believed in a beyond and an above as  
well as in a within. He distinguished God from  
the Cosmos of Man and Nature and distinguished  
them by the formal duality of cause infinite *in esse*  
and effect infinite *in posse*, without separating  
them as, indeed, their substantial unity precluded  
all such separation. Of course, his Cosmos was  
no self-originated and self-organised system  
of mechanical materialism. But it was also  
poles asunder from the deism of a clock-  
work apparatus with which ‘ the absconding  
deity,’<sup>2</sup> as purely supernatural, interfered only by

<sup>1</sup> *Astraea*

<sup>2</sup> May Sinclair : *A Defence of Idealism*

occasional special miracles, or that of an absentee landlordism under which He made capricious visits to His estate for arbitrary alterations and repairs. Neither was it the strict pantheism of an exclusively intranatural life of God, ever pervading and permeating every throb and state of man and monad but exhausted by them and in no wise entering into them from an infinite beyond and above. Were it not, on the other hand, more properly described as the ' panentheism ' of immanence combined with transcendence, intranaturalism with supernaturalism, all being in God and God being in all but all not being identified absolutely with God or emptying His infinitude ? If one might presume to symbolise, one might then meditate, not upon the dry toilet sponge, nor the sponge saturated with water but self-contained and enduringly wet while cut off from fresh supplies or somehow generating such supplies from within itself, nor the sponge with a tap over it yielding rare and refreshing drops of water, but rather a living sponge born out of the very element of, and immersed in, the living infinite sea which flows through and under it, above and around it—a sponge responsive to mysterious tides and currents and nourished by the ocean's life, the ocean, too, being ever responsive to the growing needs of the sponge ; or, again, the yet unborn child in the mother's womb, separate but still unsevered, animated in the mother's life and with

no vital functioning apart from the mother's, thus embracing both monism and dualism in *achinthyabhedabhedam* or the mystery of unity-in-difference (not unity *void* of difference).

In Immanence Emerson saw the subjective guarantee for the optimism suggested by the compensations of objective life. For evil, to him, was only the price, by no means too high, that man had to pay for inward divine freedom with exemption from mechanical necessity. As in Immanence he found the unity of Nature and Man, so in Immanence, too, he discovered the harmony of individualism and universalism, the duty of self-reliance and the use of society, the world's moral aliveness and the human spirit's moral independence of time, place and circumstance. Again, as in Immanence alone he sought the solution of theological differences, so from Immanence solely he hoped for the cure of social ills. He never forgot that religion was much more than the mere fight for right. But no religion, he maintained, was worth its salt which shrank from the fight for right when the challenge went forth in the name of underlying unities and inherent sanctities.

Hence his keen and sincere interest in political progress and social reform, not merely as an appendix or auxiliary to, but as part of the vital tissue of, his religion. A free church without a free state was to him like soul without body, even as a free

state without a free church was like body without soul. To Emerson's service for the highest ideals of the commonwealth of democracy Lowell offered a fitting tribute when he certified that 'To him more than to all other influences did the young martyrs of our Civil War owe the sustaining strength of thoughtful heroism that is so touching in every record of their lives.' It might be, as observed by Henry James (after J. E. Cabot), that 'He was by no means one of the professional abolitionists or philanthropists—never an enrolled "humanitarian;"' or, as remarked by Henry Van Dyke, that towards specific nostrums of reform 'his attitude was somewhat remote and visionary' and 'for the actual conditions of social and political life in his own time he had a fine scorn,' as witness "Our politics are battles of the kites and the crows" (or, as Matthew Arnold would say, of the Barbarians and the Philistines). None the less, it is by his general insistence upon inward-bound regeneration and forward-looking progress—by his revelation of self-evidencing and compelling truths and principles rather than by his resistance to self-doomed yet lingering errors and abuses of any specific type—that he helps, as he helped, the cause of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. And he does it not more in those tough crises when mighty principles at stake demand rescue by blood than in those peaceful walks where sweet graces in danger call for

illustration with the breath of daily life. To this effect, then, rings Emerson's apostolic message: "The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty is solved by the redemption of the soul."<sup>1</sup> Thus sayeth Conscience, the Christ in us, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me;' and whosoever would take up the cross of Duty and follow 'the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world' cannot but be a reformer, first of himself and then—even therein and thereby—of his community. New situations at every turn impose new obligations; and newer experiences at every step open out still newer vistas. Or, as we have it in the solemnly sonorous and stimulating strains of Lowell's poem on *The Present Crisis*,

'New occasions teach new duties, Time makes  
ancient good uncouth;  
They must upward still and onward who would  
keep abreast of Truth.'

So that, all Mosaic Tablets and Manu Codes—all immaculate patterns and prescriptions so called—must needs be rendered obsolete by the Living Witness within. They cannot suit: they will not suffice.

Hence Emerson's firm belief in new and ever

<sup>1</sup> Tract on *Nature*

new dispensations of the Spirit. And hence his cool contempt for the orthodox view of Life as a closed system of a purely determinist type and of Revelation as a merely transmitted report of a once for all plenary character. "Wherever a man comes, there comes revelation. The old is for slaves...Cast conformity behind you and acquaint men at first hand with Deity." <sup>1</sup> This faith in the universality of inspiration through every individual consciousness, while emancipating Emerson from all historical scriptures, prophets, creeds and churches, at the same time and on that very account made him, in his own words, "freeman of the whole estate," <sup>2</sup> disdaining no variety of religious heritage or experience. Listen to this chant from the poem on *Saadi* :

"Open innumerable doors  
The heaven where unveiled Allah pours  
The flood of truth, the flood of good,  
The Seraph's and the Cherub's food:  
Those doors are men: the Pariah hind  
Admits thee to the perfect Mind."

And again,

"From air and ocean bring me foods,  
From all zones and altitudes." <sup>3</sup>

Thus, in clear evidence of what Augustine Birrell

<sup>1</sup> *The Divinity School Address*

<sup>2</sup> *Essay on History*

<sup>3</sup> *Mithridates*

calls his fondness for ' ethnical remarks and typical persons,' <sup>1</sup> Emerson brought to bear upon his assimilative, expansive faculty

" Sparta's stoutness, Bethlehem's heart,  
Asia's rancour, Athens' art,  
Slow-sure Britain's secular might,  
And the German's inward sight." <sup>2</sup>

And he served his reverent, receptive pupilage under

" One in a Judæan manger,  
And one by Avon stream,  
One over against the mouths of Nile,  
And one in the Academe." <sup>3</sup>

So was this synthesis-loving eclectic led to his later reaffirmation, as recorded in the *Journals*, of unreserved faith in a Church Universal, the broadest of the broad, held together by a fundamental unity and community of spiritual access and coincident with what may be termed the entire Human Catholic—wider, beyond measure, than any one Roman Catholic—Church: "Can any one doubt that if the noblest saint among Buddhists, the noblest Mohametan, the highest stoic of Athens, the purest and wisest Christian, Confucius in China, Spinoza in Holland, could somewhere meet and converse together, they

<sup>1</sup> *Obiter Dicta*

<sup>2</sup> *Monodnosc*

<sup>3</sup> *Song of Nature*



would all find themselves of one religion and all would find themselves denounced by their own sects and sustained by those believed adversaries of their sects ? ” And so, to a hide-bound, custom-ridden world he pointed, as only such partialist-universalists could point, the way to make the present the inheritor, without its being the prisoner, of the past concerning the deep, free things of the spirit. Of his entire song of harmony, concord amid discord, the burden, alike in its deep bass and its treble melody, might well be heard in the closing words of the Essay already quoted from in this Chapter : “ I talked yesterday with a pair of philosophers : I endeavoured to show my good men that I liked everything by turns, and nothing long ; that I loved the centre, but doted on the superficies ; that I loved man, if men seemed to me mice and rats ; that I revered saints, but woke up glad that the old pagan world stood its ground, and died hard ; that I was glad of men of every gift and nobility, but would not live in their arms. ” <sup>1</sup>

What, then, on this view with its sweetly reasonable, spiritually catholic note of modernism, did Religion stand for to Emerson ? No mere manufactory of working power but an endless ‘ excelsior ’ ascent in being and becoming ; no make-believe nor even true belief but life ; no ceremonial phylacteries nor only good works but

<sup>1</sup> *Nominalist and Realist*

spiritual realisation ; no transferred epithet nor negotiable instrument of imputed righteousness but a personal accession to self-apprehended beatitude ; no sweet soliloquy nor sound-transference from lip to ear but communion between the Divine in man and the human in God ; no promise of, nor preparation for, a hereafter but the inflow of the hereafter into the now and the here. " The simple foundations of my belief " were thus set out by himself in his address at the second annual meeting of the Free Religious Association : " that the author of Nature has not left himself without a witness in any sane mind ; that the moral sentiment speaks to every man the law after which the Universe was made ; that we find parity, identity of design through Nature, and benefit to be the uniform aim ; that there is a force always at work to make the best better and the worst good." " Religion is that which teaches the man to go alone, not to hang on the world as a pensioner, a permitted person, but an adult, searching soul, brave to assist or resist a world." Emerson's religious faith was the seer's faith of hill-top vision, the vision upon the heights of human ascent disclosing the God envisaged in Nature and incarnated in Man. That is why he is styled ' the mountaineer of our literature ; to read him is to have the impression of being on the heights.' "

<sup>1</sup> W. J. Long : *Outlines of American Literature*

Faith, for such a soul, could not rest on evidence; because evidence rests on faith, even faith in the faculties themselves. Philosophy is only the endeavour to understand experience; and mysticism—*aparokṣhanubhoothi*—is experience brought to a focus. The soul is at once the image and the inhabitant of infinity.

“ Profounder, profounder,  
 Man’s spirit must dive;  
 ...                      ...                      ...  
 The heavens that now draw him  
 With sweetness untold,  
 Once found,—for new heavens  
 He spurneth the old.”<sup>1</sup>

An abiding sense of inadequacy about, and even contrariness among, all final expressions of truth and all finite efforts to realise the ideal led to a serene insolence of hostility to all definite dogmas, cut and dried maxims and specific nostrums, whether in the older orthodoxy or in the earlier deistic unitarianism or in the newer socio-religious fanaticism of reform. A beautiful anticipation, in every way, of the profound paradox of Rabin-dranath, ‘Where roads are made, I lose my way!’ Consequently, the manner and measure of Emerson’s signal service to the cause of universal truth is thus clearly determined by Joseph Forster: ‘Emerson did not try

<sup>1</sup> *The Sphinx*

to think for you ; he endeavoured to make you think for yourself.....He did for the mind what the sea-air does for the body—braced it. Emerson raised you, or tried to raise you, to a height from which you could look down upon the intellectual fog in which most of us live ; and enabled you to see, and tried to make you love, the pure white light of first principles.' That being so, Emerson had no patience with any professional, hierarchical, stereotyped form or formula of religion. He looked for ever-new Sinais to thunder down unheard Decalogues to new Moseses, new Bethlehems to give birth to new Messiahs of unseen Kingdoms of Heaven, new Meccas to send forth new Mahomets on unfought *jahads*, new Kurukshetras to inspire new Krishnas with unsung Gitas, and new Bo-trees to illumine new Buddhas into unfelt renunciations. In one word, he uplifted Religion from dogmatics into dynamics ; and the result was the vital religion of a " Preventing God " <sup>1</sup> of Grace infusing a fresh access of strength to bear burdens, of holiness to trample sins and of regenerateness to chasten hearts.

" I sit by the shining Fount of Life  
And pour the deluge still."

This, however, as already observed, is far from the implication that the new comes to destroy the

<sup>1</sup> *Grace*

old ; rather, it truly reflects and enriches, fulfils and vivifies it.

“ No ray is dimmed, no atom worn,  
My oldest force is good as new,  
And the fresh rose on yonder thorn  
Gives back the bending heavens in dew.”<sup>1</sup>

Another point is that Emerson was so possessed with the sense of Divine, and thereby also of inherent, ultimate human, goodness that all concern about the riddle of iniquity was sheer sacrilege to him. His firm hold of the conceivable powers of the ideal man rendered loose his grip of the apparent imperfections of the actual man. Blake's pregnant ideogram, ‘ Hell is open'd to Heaven,’<sup>2</sup> might be read also as Emerson's pithy epigram in this connection. Enough, said he, for the sinner's salvation to know that

“ Pride ruined the angels,  
Their shame them restores ;  
And the joy that is sweetest  
Lurks in stings of remorse,”<sup>3</sup>

It is noteworthy in this same context how a haunting sense of personal sin was as absent in Emerson, the ‘ Unfallen man,’ as it was present, say, in Keshub Chandra, the John the Baptist of our land

<sup>1</sup> *Song of Nature*

<sup>2</sup> *Jerusalem*

<sup>3</sup> *The Sphinx*

and age, who, born in the year of the Divinity School Address, showed otherwise so much in common with him as the intrepid spokesman and soldier of the Holy Spirit with his theory and practice of *adesh*, that is, of inspiration immediate and individual. Particularly among the poets, this feature of immaculateness constitutes in him one more mark of cognation with Wordsworth, of whom Prof. Oliver Elton smartly observes in his learned *Survey of English Literature* (1780-1830), 'For self-reproach,.....he has no remedy at all in his wallet ; he never had serious occasion for it. Wordsworth is the poet for very good people. But there are others, like Coleridge or Burns, who keep up no dignity, who are creatures of the naked sorrows and humiliations of Mother Earth, and who in recompense receive from her the words that sing home like arrows.' Rather, as Henry James puts it more properly and directly about Emerson, 'Whereas he can put his finger on the remedies,.....he has only a kind of hearsay, uninformed acquaintance with the disorders.' Of this 'ripe unconsciousness of evil,' the cause is traced partly to the fact that 'the plain, god-fearing practical society which surrounded him was not fertile in variations ;' so that 'his spirit, his moral taste, as it were, always moved within the undecorated walls of his youth.' Also, some of its consequences are found in 'a certain inadequacy and thinness in his enumerations ;' 'his direct, intimate vision of

the soul itself—not in its emotions, its contortions and perversions, but in its passive, exposed, yet healthy form ; ’ and, again, his confessed ‘ insensibility ’ to such writers as ‘ Dante and Shelley and Aristophanes and Dickens, their works containing a considerable reflection of human perversity.’ Grant that, as Henry James finally sums up, ‘ The truth was that, sparsely constructed as he was and formed not wastefully, not with material left over, as it were, for a special function, there were certain chords in Emerson that did not vibrate at all.’ Yet, the key-note of the whole music in him rang for ever and aye to the effect that the Peace of the New Testament is a flower which can grow only on the granite bed of the Righteousness of the Old Testament. Also, according to his cordial injunction, as pointed out by both Arnold and Morley, this life of righteousness by no means excluded the direct pursuit of joy and happiness without the least periphrasis, in spite of Carlyle’s thundering admonition that, perhaps, we were predestined not to be happy but to be unhappy ! If, as Prof. Elton observes, ‘ the poetry of Wordsworth is the poetry of happiness,’ no less is the philosophy of Emerson the philosophy of happiness.

In theology, then, what Emerson gives us is not a new dogma in place of old but fresh methods of approaching the mysteries of living and of realising the severe joys of the Spirit. Likewise,

in philosophy, it is true he made no original contribution to the solution of the problems of existence and experience ; and his vague and wide generalisations, such as they are, are, doubtless, open to Hutton's quaintly expressed criticism that ' You can drive a coach and six through almost any of ' them. But is it all so much of bottled moonshine only, after all ? Nay, in the estimation of Prof. Bakewell, ' More than any other writer Emerson knew how to create the atmosphere of philosophy, so that men in reading him find their idealism voicing itself all unawares.' The intuitive, *a priori* and realist theory which he accepted from Coleridge after Kant and in rejection of the Lockean doctrine of empiricism, he so lighted up, concedes Morley, with the rays of ethical and poetic imagination as to convert the philosophy into a gospel.

The sum and substance of this spiritual philosophy and gospel which we have been trying to imbibe at his feet Emerson himself epitomises thus in the *Tract on Nature* : " The first and last lesson of religion is, ' The things that are seen are temporal ; the things that are unseen are eternal.' " Add to this the following from the poem on *The Sphinx*, showing how the unseen ever shoots and shines through the seen and evermore seizes and sublimes the seer :—

" Yawns the pit of the Dragon,  
Lit by rays from the Blest;



The Lethe of nature  
 Can't trance him again,  
 Whose soul sees the perfect,  
 Which his eyes seek in vain."

Who but one like him with his

"God ! I will not be an owl,  
 But sun me in the Capitol,"<sup>1</sup>

and with his one panacea for all prevailing or possible deformities, namely, "First, soul, and second, soul, and evermore, soul,"<sup>2</sup> could 'put us in communication with a larger style of thought,' as Lowell lovingly acknowledges that Emerson did those of his day when he 'sharpened our wits with a more pungent phrase, gave us ravishing glimpses of an ideal under the dry husk of our New England, made us conscious of the supreme and everlasting originality of whatever bit of soul might be in any of us'? Yes; unto us, 'spent ones of a work-day age' with the fret and fever of a fatal faculty for movement and merriment devoid of meditation; unto us, as we

'Glance and nod and bustle by ;  
 And never once possess our soul  
 Before we die,'

Emerson's message of sweet soul-serenity and solemn spirit-satisfaction in the Life Divine comes

<sup>1</sup> *Mithridates*

<sup>2</sup> *The Divinity School Address*

as the best fulfilment of the plaintive bard's pathetic yearning in *A Southern Night*. It comes as the priceless preservative of faith and of the courage, tenderness and tranquillity born of faith.

To refer here again, in closing, to the poems in particular. If, as Emerson himself lays down regarding the sacred office of the poet, "Poetry is the consolation of mortal men....A poet comes, who lifts the veil ; gives them glimpses of the laws of the universe ; shows them the circumstance as illusion ; " <sup>1</sup> and if, to this end,

"To clothe the fiery thought  
In simple words succeeds,"

how straight the missives of his own muse enter into the heart and dower the self with eyes and ears and a mind pricked to alertness ! How true it is that we cannot ponder them at all without (as Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* would say) thinking better of ourselves because they make us entertain a more favourable opinion of humankind ! How beautifully, if we but let them sing their way into our affections, do his numbers help us to live intensely—to live not ignorantly nor ignobly to scorn all delights but the delight of living laborious days, days devoted to the thought of the Truest, the love of the Holiest and the service of the Best ! Spite of the paucity of directly religious poems, the whole body of his poetical work de-

<sup>1</sup> *Poetry and Imagination*

serves to be reckoned as purely religious in tone, designed as it is 'not so much to set forth human emotion or to give æsthetic delight as to stimulate moral or spiritual ardour' <sup>1</sup> and possessed as it is of 'many qualities for which an orthodox mind would have sought expression in hymns.' <sup>2</sup> Emerson furnishes one more signal instance of how, with the great modern poets, poetry has been a religion in that they seriously and consciously rest their art upon a high habit of thought and feeling and discuss the great questions of human life, not, as in the days of Pope, from the point of view of reason and intellect, but from deep sensibility and with the conviction that the heart must be kept scrupulously clean and the soul in harmony with all right and beautiful things if the poet is to give his best—a religion the doctrine and the discipline of which may be found happily formulated, respectively, in Wordsworth's dicta :

'Oh! 'tis the *heart* that magnifies this life,  
Making a truth and beauty of her own:' <sup>3</sup>

and

'A POET!—He hath put his heart to school.' <sup>4</sup>

Here, too, is the Emersonian aphorism thereon :  
"Where the heart is, there the gods sojourn, and not in any geography of fame." And as for

<sup>1</sup> Wendell and Greenough: *A History of Literature in America*; and Wendell: *A Literary History of America*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *To Lycoris*

<sup>4</sup> *Sonnet*

scope of subject, he illustrates, also, how the whole range of human thought and experience, every phase through which the World-Spirit has passed and promises to pass, has its place in the modern poetry of the Concrete Universal - a sympathy with mankind as a whole and especially with the poor ; a hatred of social injustice and class tyranny ; and an ascent direct through Nature's ' darkness visible ' up into ' the light that never was on sea or land.' In this regard, he even offers, after Wordsworth, 'in some sort a complement and counterpoise' to the *general* tradition of Neo-romanticism, while embracing its common traits. Prof. Elton's words apply, point by point, with equal truth to Emerson as well, when he says : ' The ethical gravity, the patriot heroism, of Wordsworth, as well as his concern with the spiritual side of common life, and, on the other hand, with exalted philosophic matter, contrast with the absorption in beauty for its own sake, the frequent indifference to public matters, the life lived in an enchanted self-created world, and the carelessness of metaphysics, which have distinguished many of the romantic poets.' Emerson's poems have at least all the true and rich material of poetry, though not perfectly wrought out always by what Wordsworth would call ' the accomplishment of verse.' Wordsworth himself and Goethe, too (as pointed out by Henry James), ' give one a sense of having found their form, whereas with

Emerson we never lose the sense that he is still seeking it. But no one has had so steady and constant, and, above all, so natural, a vision of what we require and what we are capable of in the way of aspiration and independence.' Why disbelieve, then, that 'he serves but will not wear out'? They tell us he can announce but he cannot argue. We tell our minds his weakness is his strength! They tell us his songs are not song-like. We tell our hearts his songs are sage-like! Limitations, doubtless, he has, as who has not his own? Loftiness, too, has he not, as many others have not, at any rate, of the same kind and degree? To put it typically, what though, seen once at work with the spade, Emerson only elicited his little son's caution: 'Take care, papa, you will dig your leg.'? Was it not the self-same wight who, coming upon the tasselled garden-rose, would instantly take off his hat in silent, spontaneous adoration of the Being of all Beauty, the Lord of all Loveliness? And whichever furnishes the truer representation of the real man in reference to his relations with Nature—the awkward spademan or the more than admirable seer? Nay, is not the story of the awkward spademan the more dearly interesting, even and only because it is a story about the more than admirable seer? Then, may we not exclaim *Sursum Corda*—'Lift up your hearts'—in all thankfulness for the poems now passed in general review as a sheaf of precious

leaves broidered with beautiful fancies and blazoned with eloquent runes ? *Sursum Corda* for this superman, ‘ an iconoclast without a hammer,’ in W. C. Gannett’s charming phrase, ‘ who took down our idols from their pedestals so tenderly that it seemed like an act of worship ; ’ not merely the Erasmus of New England Renaissance—which certainly he was, as that scholarly divine of the lion-heart, Theodore Parker, by his side, was the Luther of New England Reformation—but also a *World-Vates*—prophet, poet, philosopher and preacher ; seer, sage and saint for all nationalities—to reclaim the logic-chopping machines of an iron age into the love-cherishing gods of a golden eternity under the habitual breath of

‘ An ampler ether, a diviner air ’ ! <sup>1</sup>

So may little Emersons and great Emersons grow up *in* us and *amongst* us for the behoof, in our day and generation, of this our luckless land, albeit the land of Emerson-like *Rishis* and *Rishiputhras* (worthy sons of worthy fathers) ! And may all “unitarians of the united world ” <sup>2</sup>—so to crown them with a name hallowed by the Master himself—join hearts and hands unto that thrice-blessed end, while perchance a few shall smile upon this humblest of *Tahayif-ul-Muwahiddin* !

“ The sower scatters broad his seed,  
The wheat thou strew’st be souls.” <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth : *Laodamia*

<sup>2</sup> *Blight*

<sup>3</sup> *Intellect*



Part II—Special :  
STUDIES IN THE POEMS





## CHAPTER V

### POEMS OF ART

Of the several groups of poems, the consideration of the Poems of Art, setting forth chiefly Emerson's own conception of Poetry, its function and features, will make a fitting prelude to the detailed examination of his own achievement in that line—a fairly exhaustive task save for a few stray epigrams, quatrains and translations.

As over their view of Nature, so, too, over that of the true ends of Art and of Poetry, in particular, and also that of the mission of their own life-work, we discover a striking point of contact between Wordsworth and Emerson. Wordsworth, it is well known, honoured Art only as a faithful reflection of Nature, held Poetry to be at once the source and the substance of all true knowledge and made it his 'delight to pipe a simple song for thinking hearts' out of the ardent desire to be known himself as 'a teacher or nothing at all.' He it was who wrote,

'Thy Art be Nature; the live current quaff,  
And let the groveller sip his stagnant pool.'<sup>1</sup>

With Emerson, likewise, as we gather specifically from the fine little poem entitled **Art**, to idealise the

<sup>1</sup> *A Poet !—He hath put his heart to school*

real by glorifying it with the “ grace and glamour of romance ” is the function of Art in

“ statue, picture, park, and hall,  
Ballad, flag and festival.”

So the moonlight is brought “ into noon hid in gleaming piles of stones ; ” and “ gardens lined with lilacs sweet ” stand planted “ on the city’s paved street ; ” and

“ spouting fountains cool the air ,  
Singing in the sun-baked square ; ”

and “ the drudge in dusty frock ” shall

“ Spy behind the city clock  
Retinues of airy kings,  
Skirts of angels, starry wings,  
His fathers shining in bright fables,  
His children fed at heavenly tables.”

And so we have denoted the very antithesis of Peter Bell’s insensibility to the poetry and philosophy of the primrose.

The closing lines of the poem thus convey the sense of the supreme vocation in question :

“ ’Tis the privilege of Art  
Thus to play its cheerful part,  
Man on earth to acclimate,  
And bend the exile to his fate,  
And moulded of one element,  
With the days and firmament,  
Teach him on these as stairs to climb,  
And live on even terms with Time.”

Hence the solemn duty laid upon the **Artist** ever to "quit the hut, frequent the palace," in the spirit of the lofty idealism distilled into the precept, "Hitch your waggon to a star."<sup>1</sup> The exacting severity of the equipment, agreeably to the sacred sublimity of the aim as also the responsive soundness of the instrument, is just as we find it admirably sketched out by that prince of Indian critics, Aravinda Ghosh, in his recent illuminating thesis on *The Renaissance in India*: 'The primitive aim of art and poetry is to create images of man and Nature which shall satisfy the sense of beauty and embody artistically the ideas of the intelligence about life and the responses of the imagination to it. But in spiritual culture they become too in their aim a revelation of greater things concealed in man and Nature and of the deepest spiritual and universal beauty.'

From such a Pisgah-peak of vision, there issue through Emerson a few brief yet specific enunciations of the inner spirit and the relative quality of the two plastic arts of the pencil and the chisel as also the ethereal art of sound-harmony. Beauty being the informing, pervasive, permanent essence and energy of being, never to be withdrawn or veiled from 'that inward eye' which Wordsworth acclaims in the first of his sonnets *To A Painter*, the warmest vestures of colour, laid never so thick, fail, we are

<sup>1</sup> Essay on Civilisation

reminded, to screen the view in the least.<sup>1</sup> Hence the sharp, suggestive contrast drawn between **Painting and Sculpture** :

“ The sinful painter drapes his goddess warm,  
Because she still is naked, being dressed :  
The godlike sculptor will not so deform  
Beauty, which limbs and flesh enough invest.”

And as to that other art with its especial ‘ charms to soothe the savage breast,’ says the **Maiden Speech of the Æolian Harp**, the noblest and most soul-stirring expression of it is the most natural—that which unlocks the secret harmonies of the heart of Nature, not by the too artificial means of “ lips or finger-tips,” but by the “ tenderer touch,” the true artistic *rapprochement*, of the harp and its “ brother,” the wind. “ Unbind and give me to the air ” is thus all that the harp asks of “ genial care.”

“ For gentle harp to gentle hearts  
The secret of the world imparts ;  
...                      ...                      ...  
For I can mend the happiest days,  
And charm the anguish of the worst.”

Here, as we may discern, is a sort of antiphonal response to the solemn cadence of Wordsworth’s stanzas *On the Power of Sound*—of

‘ warbled air,  
Whose piercing sweetness can unloose  
The chains of frenzy, or entice a smile  
Into the ambush of despair.’

Mark, the appeal is from “gentle harp to gentle hearts.” Preceding and surpassing the outer marvel of the receptive adaptation of the instrument to the forces of Nature without is the inner miracle of the faculties of Nature within. The perceptive sense and the interpretative spirit are, as we find, the two factors rightly correlated in Wordsworth’s formula,

‘ A Spirit ærial  
Informs the cell of Hearing, dark and blind ! ’

Or, as he puts the vital truth more clearly and categorically in *Yarrow Revisited*,

‘ Yea, what were mighty Nature’s self ?  
Her features, could they win us,  
Unhelped by the poetic voice  
That hourly speaks within us ? ’

And thus, in the psychological analysis, we are brought face to face with that hidden Artist behind all Art and Nature on whom Emerson muses in the couplet,

“ The passive Master lent his hand  
To the vast soul that o’er him planned,”<sup>1</sup>

and of whom the ancient *rishis* sang, ‘ When He shines, everything shines after Him; by His light all this is lighted,’<sup>2</sup> and, again, ‘ It is He who is

<sup>1</sup> *The Problem*

<sup>2</sup> *Kathopanishad* (Max Muller’s translation)

the ear of the ear, the understanding of the understanding, the speech of speech. He is the life of life, the eye of the eye.'<sup>1</sup>

Above all, in the role of the premier votary of Una, the queen of all the arts—"A moody child and wildly wise" of the family of

"Olympian bards who sung  
Divine ideas below"

--The Poet, as delineated in one of the quatrains, plays the master-mariner who ever from the land

"Steers his bark and trims his sail ;  
Right out to sea his courses stand,  
New worlds to find in pinnace frail."

He is the seer of penetrative vision whose "joyful eyes," choosing "like meteors their way," rive "the dark with private ray," overleap "the horizon's edge" and search "with Apollo's privilege." It is he upon whose ears all discords break to blend into the universal harmonies of Nature and be voiced forth in prophet-tones as "musical order, and pairing rhymes" heard afar "through worlds, and races, and terms, and times."

How lofty Emerson's conception was of this exalted office of the poet-singer—so consonant with Wordsworth's dictum,

<sup>1</sup> *Kenopanishad* (Pandit Sitanath Tattwabhashan's translation)

' For deathless powers to verse belong,  
And they like Demi-gods are strong  
On whom the Muses smile, ' <sup>1</sup>

—is brought out in the first short piece on **Merlin**, the type of "the kingly bard." "Free, peremptory, clear"—this is how the chords of the harp should ring. "Meddling wit," therefore, cannot "affect to hit or compass that"

" Which only the propitious mind,  
Publishes when 'tis inclined."

"Sudden, at unawares, self-moved," it is given to the poet to

" mount to paradise  
By the stairway of surprise."

The spontaneity of the ascent belongs to the

" open hours  
When the God's will sallies free "

"as blows the breeze." And the strains of the Muse carry with them all the might and masterfulness of the "strokes of fate" in Nature's course and in man's circumstance—

" Chiming with the forest tone,  
When boughs buffet boughs in the wood;  
Chiming with the gasp and moan  
Of the ice-imprisoned flood;  
With the pulse of manly hearts;  
With the voice of orators;

<sup>1</sup> Upon the same occasion (September, 1819)



With the din of city arts;  
 With the cannonade of wars;  
 With the marches of the brave;  
 And prayers of might from martyrs' cave."

Thus, on the one hand, the poet's utterance is the awe-striking roll and revelation of

" Artful thunder which conveys  
 Secrets of the solar track,  
 Sparks of the supersolar blaze."

Nay; " the flowing fortunes of a thousand years " stretch out clearly laid bare beneath " the soaring orbit of the Muse." Then, on the other hand, as the poet

" Can make the wild blood start  
 In its mystic springs,"

so

" He shall daily joy dispense  
 Hid in song's sweet influence. "

And

" Things more cheerly live and go;"

for, we are assured,

" Songs can the tempest still,  
 Scattered on the stormy air,  
 Mould the year to fair increase  
 And bring in poetic peace."

Hence the final announcement,

" Great is the art,  
 Great be the manners, of the bard.  
 He shall not his brain encumber

With the coil of rhythm and number ;  
But, leaving rule and pale forethought,  
He shall aye climb  
For his rhyme."

The second poem on **Merlin** describes the power of poesy—visionary, as it is called, but truest-visioned of all—over the practical concerns even of the State. And this in consonance with, and as an illustration of, the untold counterpart-assortments of "balance-loving Nature" on the two hemispheres of matter and mind—a favourite persuasion enforced also in one of the two pieces on **Compensation**.

As a summing-up of all the wholesome virtues of verse, we are told in **Merlin's Song** of the rejuvenating efficacy of the strain that so peals in the heart of its music that

" they who hear it shed their age,  
And take their youth again."

Or, as the closing lines of the piece on *The Poet* put it, its "divine ideas"

" Always find us young,  
And always keep us so."

Lastly, no more glowing tribute was ever paid to the poet and his task than in the exquisite poem entitled **The House**. It presents a simple but suggestive allegory of the Muse as the supreme architect whose materials of everlasting durability—

“ rafters of immortal pine,” “ cedar incorruptible” and “ adamant for each eternal block ”—are chosen warily from many forests, valleys, mines, ledges and rocks.

“ There is no architect  
Can build as the Muse can.

She lays her beam in music,  
In music every one,  
To the cadence of the whirling world  
Which dances round the sun;  
That so they shall not be displaced  
By lapses or by wars,  
But for the love of happy souls,  
Outlive the newest stars.”

Like Merlin of Western myth, **Saadi** of Eastern mysticism is honoured by Emerson as a representative poet—“ son of eastern morning,” “ the wisdom of the gods,” “ the man of truth,” “ the cheerer of men’s hearts.” Hence, the thrice-beautiful poem named after him of whom Emerson says, “ Through his Persian dialect he speaks to all nations,” once more lays down in telling language the characteristic conditions of the true poet’s estate. Perforce living his inmost life alone in the companionless retreat of a world all his own, he yet cannot dispense with the race of men for his audience—even for his own self-amplification. Solitude, of course, is more than his inevitable lot. It is, in fact, his prime need for the sake of thought

and all its 'impulses of deeper birth.'<sup>1</sup> For, as *Sartor* has it, 'Bees will not work except in darkness; Thought will not work except in silence; neither will Virtue work except in secrecy.' Accordingly,

'He is retired as noontide dew,  
Or fountain in a noon-day grove.'<sup>2</sup>

Love, again, is the very breath of his life;

'for mightier far  
Than strength of nerve and sinew, or the sway  
Of magic potent over sun and star  
Is love, though oft to agony distressed.'<sup>3</sup>

So, "tremulous with love-lore,"<sup>4</sup> he is drawn to brother-man and sister-woman by the resistless bonds of love. And thus, altogether, the Poet is he who follows and fulfils faithfully the Wordsworthian injunction,

'If Thought and Love desert us, from that day  
Let us break off all commerce with the Muse :  
With Thought and Love companions of our way,  
Whate'er the senses take or may refuse,  
The Mind's internal heaven shall shed her dews  
Of inspiration on the humblest lay.'<sup>5</sup>

As for 'agony,' the concomitant of love, why, the poet is enabled to fulfil his sacred ministration the

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth : *A Poet's Epitaph*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Wordsworth : *Laodamia*

<sup>4</sup> *Casella*

<sup>5</sup> Sonnet : *Most sweet it is with unuplifted eyes*

better even as he tastes of the " bitter fount " of " wormwood."

" For out of woe and out of crime,  
Draws the heart a lore sublime."

Thus is reaffirmed Cowper's conviction,

" The path of sorrow, and that alone,  
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown ;" <sup>1</sup>

and thus, too, Shelley's confession,

' Most wretched men  
Are cradled into poetry by wrong;  
They learn in suffering what they teach  
in song.' <sup>2</sup>

To show, further, that the man of sorrows is ever the man of service and of " sunshine in his heart," it is added that, having drained the cup of sadness, still

" Saadi sat in the sun,  
And thanks was his contrition ;  
For haircloth and for bloody whips,  
Had active hands and smiling lips."

Then follows in solemn tones the Muse's injunction to her chosen minion in his cot not to be tempted to listen to " sons of contradiction " nor to enter the lists of controversy on any account.

<sup>1</sup> *To An Afflicted Protestant Lady*

<sup>2</sup> *Julian and Maddalo*

“ Let theist, atheist, pantheist,  
 Define and wrangle how they list,  
 Fierce conserver, fierce destroyer,—  
 But thou, joy-giver and enjoyer,  
 Unknowing war, unknowing crime,  
 Gentle Saadi, mind thy rhyme;  
 Heed not what the brawlers say.”

Furthermore, inasmuch as all Nature is already in active attendance, filling him through unsuspected channels of providence and inspiration, the ‘ anointed ’ is warned to

“ Seek nothing,—Fortune seeketh thee.

Wish not to fill the isles with eyes,  
 To fetch thee birds of paradise :  
 On thine orchard’s edge belong  
 All the brags of plume and song.”

The poet thus endowed, disciplined and called to his work stands forth acclaimed as one—and one amongst how few that appear at age-long intervals !  
 —whose

“ words like a storm-wind can bring  
 Terror and beauty on their wing;  
 In his every syllable  
 Lurketh nature veritable;  
 And though he speak in midnight dark,—  
 In heaven no star, on earth nospark,—  
 Yet before the listener’s eye  
 Swims the world in ecstasy.”

Nevertheless, as emphasises the poem on **Una**, with its haunting beauty keyed to the lighter movement, it is not always and everywhere that the poet compels recognition in a world of contempt-breeding familiarity. In the humdrum routine of domestic life and work, man, generally speaking, fails to rise above "homely thought" to aught like a sublime vision of Truth. Oftentimes, he grows so insensate as altogether to "miss" the unattained glory, while himself engrossed in the daily round of "house and garden-plot" enjoyments. Even granting that, at times, within the commonplace sphere of immediate surroundings,

" a deeper thought may light  
The inward sky with chrysolite,  
And I greet from far the ray,  
Aurora of a dearer day,"

it amounts, at best, to but a 'visitation' of Truth—an experience by far inferior in spiritual value to that state of absorption in Truth wherein the thinking subject becomes sublimated into "a thought of hers." But this latter 'access of mind' (with 'sensation, soul, and form all melted into him' and 'his animal being' 'swallowed up') is, as a rule, reserved only for one who pilgrims abroad beyond the prosaic planes, being led in his adventurous quest to "wander far by East and West" for her and with her, who is "roving, roving" evermore. Then, however "half-seen" as in "clouded dreams," she "sits

beside " " in foreign faces." This prevailing feature of elusiveness in the near and accessibility in the far on the part of the lovely damsel of *The Faerie Queene*—Wordsworth's 'heavenly Una with her milk-white Lamb'<sup>1</sup>—is, we learn, but an image and illustration of the common lot of the poet (as of the prophet), who must remain "hidden and unknown" "in his native town," whereas he does come to his own abroad as his name

"To foreign parts is blown by fame."

All the same, world-poets there are (just a few) who have come to command universal allegiance as the 'anointed' among 'the chosen seed.' And who are they? This enquiry is raised in the poem headed **The Test**, an utterance of the Muse in which, if we have "eyes to find," we are challenged to specify those five and only five archetypes whom time cannot unmake as "sunshine cannot bleach the snow;" whose work, indeed, has outlasted the relentless winnowings of the wind and the fierce furnace-blasts of the smelting-pot.

The **Solution** is offered by the Muse herself in the complementary, counterpart poem added under that title, a remarkable composition which tells of the birth of the spheres in music and of the

<sup>1</sup> *Personal Talk*



progression of the races, their outer conditions and inner characteristics being neatly hit off with a due display of the historic and the critical sense in each case. The "unfading petals five," therein named, are the following :—First and foremost, Homer, elsewhere called "the poet sire,"<sup>1</sup> who, as

"Forward stepped the perfect Greek,"  
"sung"

"That wit and joy might find a tongue,  
And earth grow civil."

Next, Dante, who

"Searched the triple spheres  
And, sculptor-like, his large design  
Etched on Alp and Apennine."

Then, Shakespeare, in whom

"England's genius filled all measure  
Of heart and soul, of strength and pleasure,  
Gave to the mind its emperor,  
And life was larger than before."

Again, Swedenborg, who "in spirit-worlds" "trod alone,"

"In trance upborne past mortal goal."

And lastly, Goethe, who

"In newer days of war and trade,  
Romance forgot, and faith decayed,

<sup>1</sup> *May-Day*

When Science armed and guided war,

... ..

Drew the firm lines of Fate and Life,  
And brought Olympian wisdom down,

... ..

The open secret of to-day."

It will be recalled how, in the celebrated prose discourses on *Representative Men*, the homage thus rendered is repeated before the thrones of three of these sovereign spirits --Shakespeare as the poet, Swedenborg as the mystic and Goethe as the writer. In regard, especially, to Shakespeare, "the myriad-minded," Emerson is always full of amazement at the unsounded depth of his genius ; although, with his own coldness towards the aspect of the dramatic artist, he disparages the use of that genius "for the public amusement."

"Nor sequent centuries could hit  
Orbit and sum of Shakespeare's wit."

Again, the reference to him in another place<sup>1</sup> is as "Shakespeare, whom no mind can measure," while a separate quatrain runs thus :

"I see all human wits  
Are measured but a few ;  
Unmeasured still my Shakespeare sits.  
Lone as the blessed Jew."

<sup>1</sup> *May-Day*

Here, in this connection, with the name of Saadi may be coupled that of his brother-bard of Persia, **Hafiz**, "the Tongue of the Secret," from whom Emerson gives some appreciative renderings of mystic teaching, notably the call for the symbolic wine of sacred revelry and inebriation "which with sudden greatness fills us,"

"wherewith the Houris teach  
Souls the ways of paradise,"

"whose pureness searcheth hearts" and washes clean "the weather-stains of cares," "which increases life,"

"imparts the sight  
Of the five heaven-domes with nine steps"

and "wakes the torpid heart" as nought else can.

In one **Ghaselle**, the God-intoxicated Sufi poet—more truly a "hermit wise" and "just fakir" than any "dervise" to whom he would apply the epithets—sings of himself,

"On the first day, poor Hafiz' clay  
Was kneaded up with wine,"

and to himself,

"Up! Hafiz, grace from high God's face  
Beams on thee pure."

So, too, is celebrated the 'strange joy elate' of 'the rapt inebriate' in Whittier's description of the old Vedic rite in *The Breving of Soma*.

In precisely the same vein and under the same imagery, we have, also, an original composition in honour of **Bacchus**, serving to show to what spiritual account sensuous concepts may be turned by the fine frenzy of a robust poetic faith—the very “philosopher’s stone” that Hafiz claims his wine to be. And thus is clearly voiced forth the modern mystic’s pure yet passionate yearning for intoxication :

“ Bring me wine, but wine which never grew  
In the belly of the grape.

... ..

We buy diluted wine ;  
Give me of the true,—  
Whose ample leaves and tendrils curled  
Among the silver hills of heaven,  
Draw everlasting dew ;  
Wine of wine,  
Blood of the world,  
Form of forms and mould of statures,  
That I, intoxicated,  
And by the draught assimilated,  
May float at pleasure through all natures ;

... ..

Rainbow-flowering, wisdom-fruited  
Wine which is already man,  
Food which teach and reason can ;  
Wine which music is,—  
Music and wine are one,—  
That I, drinking this,  
Shall hear far Chaos talk with me.”

## CHAPTER VI

### POEMS OF NATURE

Coming next to Emerson's Poems of Nature, one need hardly entertain any hesitancy in ranking them among the best of their kind in all literature. By themselves they should suffice to ensure him a not unworthy place in the Poets' Corner of the world's Westminster. In fact, they show certain features not recognisable outside the like productions of a few of the school of Wordsworth. In the ascending scale of the hierarchy comprising the painter, the pupil, the philosopher and the prophet of Nature, Emerson's highest includes all the lower grades and more. The intimacy of his relations with Nature ; his deep, abiding communion with her spirit in its varying moods and manifestations ; and the fruition of this intercourse in 'the joy of elevated thoughts'—these, as already observed, are obvious at every turn in such characteristic specimens as *Woodnotes*, *Monadnoc* and *May-Day*.

To begin with, *The Apology* reads much like a continuation of the *Reply to Expostulation* and *The Tables Turned* in Wordsworth and forms all one golden lay of self-vindication on the highest

ground. Its reproduction here in full needs no 'apology.'

" Think me not unkind and rude  
That I walk alone in grove and glen ;  
I go to the god of the wood  
To fetch his word to men.

" Tax not my sloth that I  
Fold my arms beside the brook ;  
Each cloud that floated in the sky  
Writes a letter in my book.

" Chide me not, laborious band,  
For the idle flowers I brought ;  
Every aster in my hand  
Goes home loaded with a thought.

" There was never mystery  
But 'tis figured in the flowers ;  
Was never secret history  
But birds tell it in the bowers.

" One harvest from thy field  
Homeward brought the oxen strong ;  
A second crop thine acres yield,  
Which I gather in a song."

How magnificent becomes this rare privilege of the lovely lover of contemplative wisdom under the tutelage of Nature ! He may be looked askance at and even met with derision and denunciation on the charge of savage and slothful detachment by an all too busy world engrossed in the secular, the superficial and the sordid. Yet how ample is the indemnity that he shall find in the richness of

the revelations of which he stands the chosen recipient,

‘ Sheltered, but not to social duties lost,  
Secluded, but not buried ! ’ <sup>1</sup>

If the purpose of the quest looms high, the profit, too, stands not less assured. And how ?

We turn, for the answer, to the lines prefixed to the Essay on **Nature**, philosophically as well as practically significant as laying down the twofold condition of attainment in this direction. Objectively, there is present everywhere the spirit of self-elucidation through the densest darkness. “Self-kindled every atom glows,” though “nine times folded in mystery.” And this principle operates ever along lines of the mutual announcement and approach of like to like.

“ Spirit that lurks each form within  
Beckons to spirit of its kin.”

Or, as Wordsworth has it,

‘ the forms  
Of Nature have a passion in themselves,  
That intermingles with those works of man  
To which she summons him.’ <sup>2</sup>

So that, subjectively, if one would enter into “the secret of its (Nature’s) labouring heart,” the sole, supreme preparation required is inward approximation of character between the knower and the

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth : *The Excursion*

<sup>2</sup> *The Prelude*

known through the discipline of sympathy—a doctrine emphasised by Carlyle as well in his favourite illustration of the vulpine faculty. Hence, in re-enunciation of Wordsworth's

‘ By grace divine,  
Not otherwise, O Nature ! we are thine,  
Through good and evil thine, in just degree  
Of rational and manly sympathy,’<sup>1</sup>

the ‘ open sesame ’ to ‘ the open secret ’ of the universe is summed up by Emerson in the formula,

“ Throb thine with Nature's throbbing breast,  
And all is clear from east to west.”

Thus, as with Wordsworth, so with Emerson, the realisation of a pre-existing harmony between Man and Nature is at once the prerequisite and the pledge of direct revelation through ‘ the vision and the faculty divine.’ Inasmuch as the feeling heart alone makes the seeing eye, we are led to perceive the utter helplessness of the mere probing intellect. That is how, in the words of another poem which goes by the same name,

“ Nature, hating art and pains,  
Baulks and baffles plotting brains.”

That is also how, on the other hand, as continues the latter piece, that vital filiation between the spirit in Man and the spirit in Nature which verily

<sup>1</sup> *Not in the Lucid Intervals of Life*



makes "hero and maiden, flesh of her flesh"  
carries the intercommunication so far that

" Nature listens in the rose  
And hearkens in the berry's bell "

and, in response,

" Pours her power into the people,  
Merry and manifold without bar,  
Makes and moulds them what they are."

Consequently,

" What's most theirs is not their own,  
...                      ...                      ...  
And in their vaunted works of Art  
The master-stroke is still her part."

Here, again, we strike upon Emerson's theory of Art, which is that of the thoroughgoing romanticist from one point of view. That is the best work of art, he maintains, as already indicated, which allows the freest play to the kindly influences of Nature; and he is the foremost artist who holds himself most passively receptive to those influences. Even as, in Carlyle's conception, the heroism of the hero is rightly traced to a vivifying touch with the heart of Nature and as, in Emerson's own interpretation of *The Problem*,

" Out from the heart of Nature rolled  
The burdens of the Bible old,"

so, too, with reference to poetry, Emerson would uphold the judgment of Milton that 'sweetest

Shakespeare, Fancy's child,' is what he is, even because he 'warbles his native wood-notes wild.'

This classic, significant term, **Woodnotes**, is borrowed by Emerson himself for the title of one of the rarest of his own outpourings which treat of the many-toned warblings of the voice of Nature unto an ear of genuine poetic sensibility. Those are warblings the spirit of which, among modern prose-writers, is recaptured, in his breezy, bracing style, by R. L. Stevenson in a delightful essay under the name of *Pan's Pipes*.<sup>1</sup> The poem opens with a charming account of how the true "poet is at home" in "woodland walks" and amid "birds and trees" and by "the river-side" and "in the meadows wide ;" how, as "wise Saadi dwells alone," his commerce is not with the unheeding rabble, for

" Knowledge this man prizes best  
Seems fantastic to the rest ;"

and how, in close communion with Nature's ways, this "Cæsar of his leafy Rome" stands out a veritable

" Lover of all things alive,  
Wonderer at all he meets,  
Wonderer chiefly at himself."

Then, as Wordsworth, at the beginning of *The Excursion*, tells of his sudden meeting, in the

<sup>1</sup> *Virginibus Puerisque*

wilds of Westmoreland, with an old friend, the Wanderer—one of ‘the poets that are sown by Nature,’ so Emerson goes on to describe the experiences of another such member of the same class known to himself, “a forest seer,” “pilgrim wise,” “philosopher,” “hermit,” so converted by the gracious partiality and unfailing fidelity of Nature yielding up all her charms and mysteries, as it were, to his “secret sight.” His intrepid feet are lured on and on by ever-engaging shapes and sights and sounds, some of which are hit off with wonderful exactness and fancy, like “the woodcock’s evening hymn,” “the slight Linnaea” with “its twin-born heads,” “the death-hymn of the perfect” pine as it falls with one single crash declaring “the close of its green century,” and “green tents by eldest Nature dressed” with “living towers” and “giddy,” sungilt tops.

“His hearth the earth—his hall the azure dome ;  
Where his clear spirit leads him there’s his road.  
By God’s own light illumined and foreshowed.”

And, in words that wear the unmistakable impress of Wordsworth, we are told of this “musing peasant lowly great” that he

“knew by heart  
Each joy the mountain dales impart ;”

and that, seated by the forest water on his throne of “the rope-like pine roots crosswise grown,” “he was the heart of all the scene,” like the feeble

but resolute Leech-gatherer in the midst of his dismal and desolate landscape. Here follow, throughout the second part of the poem, the wood-notes proper in the continued utterance of the Pine-Tree—as George Eliot would call it, the patrician spokesman of the forest, first-born of all the elements. Quite after the manner of the soul-elevating messages delivered by the Wanderer and the Pastor to the Solitary amid the manifestations of Nature, the Pine pours forth “the song of its waterfall tones” in passage after passage that well may prompt the acclamation, ‘*Gloria In Excelsis* !

“ The countless leaves of the pine are strings  
Turned to the lay the wood-god sings.”

And in what strain and to what effect sings this “wood-god” of the Pine-Tree—a symbol recurrently in evidence, like the Æolian Harp, to express the genius of Emerson through his pages in both prose and verse?

The discourse, at the outset, professes to be in the universal language of Nature intelligibly rehearsed in every age and clime, opening to each individual his own “bosom-secret” and sounding clear to every soul “in a voice of solemn cheer ;” so that

“ The least breath my boughs which tossed  
Brings again the Pentecost.”

In the first place, life lived in company with the solitudes, and by the light of the secrets, of

Nature is exalted far above life passed at "the loaded board" of "the palace hall." And this is not simply through the morbid sensitiveness of the tender-souled hankerer after 'a cot beside the hill.' But it is out of an elemental passion for the full-blown "power and grace" of "royal man," so unlike the "spawning, spawning myrmidons" in Beranger's satiric stroke,<sup>1</sup> into whose hand, alas, "Jove gives the globe" today. Both as regards the health of the body and, what is more, of the soul, with

'that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude,'<sup>2</sup>

"the city's poisoning spleen" is sharply contrasted with the invigoration of "hills and floods," "the rain and the wind," "the dawn and the day-star,"

"The mounting sap, the shells, the sea,  
All spheres, all stones."

Thus proceeds the contrast amplified: "One dry, and one the living tree;" the former "pale, or fat, or lean," "vain, sour" and "frivolous," and "mad, athirst" and "garrulous;" and the latter "grave, chaste, contented, though retired," with the pure "radiance" of virtue in the eye and with "formidable innocence" for defence.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted and translated in *The Conduct of Life : Culture*

<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth ; *The Daffodils*

Genius flourishes with the boughs of the Pine,  
the roots of both being nourished in common  
by "want and cold." There, love shall be  
happy, too, not through artificial charms but  
by the abiding attraction of "like to like."

Then, in exposition of 'the method of Nature'  
(on the lines of the familiar prose-address bearing  
that title), swells the paean of

"the mystic song  
Chanted when the sphere was young."

And it is worthy of note how the account of "the  
genesis of things" (put into the mouth of the Pine)  
enlists poetry as the plastic vehicle of scientific  
technicalities, when the poet speaks of

"Tendency through endless ages,  
Of star-dust, and star-pilgrimages,  
Of rounded worlds, of space and time,  
Of the old flood's subsiding slime,  
Of chemic matter, force, and form,  
Of poles and powers, cold, wet, and warm,"

and of how

"The rushing metamorphosis,  
Dissolving all that fixture is,  
Melts things that be to things that seem,  
And solid nature to a dream."

Compare also, in illustration of the above, the  
following lines from the piece on *Compensation*

by way of a snatch from "the undersong" in this story of Evolution :—

"Gauge of more and less through space,  
Electric star or pencil plays,  
The lonely Earth amid the balls  
That hurry through the eternal halls,  
A makeweight flying to the void,  
Supplemental asteroid,  
Or compensatory spark,  
Shoots across the neutral Dark."

Next comes

"the fatal song  
Which knits the world in music strong,"

enlarging upon, and exemplifying, Emerson's favourite philosophy of the rhyme-and-circle-relations teeming through the universe.

"Thou canst not wave thy staff in air,  
Or dip thy paddle in the lake,  
But it carves the bow of beauty there,  
And the ripples in rhymes the oar forsake."

So, it is the part of wisdom for "unbound, unrhymed," "misplaced, mistimed" man to learn the lesson how

"Not unrelated, unaffied,  
But to each thought and thing allied,  
Is perfect Nature's every part,  
Rooted in the mighty Heart."

It is just the same lesson as runs in the words

of ' the venerable Sage ' of *The Excursion* thus :

‘ Whate’er exists hath properties that spread  
Beyond itself ;                    ...                    ...  
                  ...                    ...                    ...                    ...  
Spirit that knows no insulated spot,  
No chasm, no solitude ; from link to link,  
It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.’

If, therefore, seeing, we yet see not, and, hearing, hear not, “ the bright parable ; ” and if all our vaunted enlightenment leads but to the cynic conclusion that

“ Nature has miscarried wholly  
Into failure, into folly,”

there is added the solemn warning,

“ Alas ! thine is the bankruptcy,  
Blessed Nature so to see.

Behind thee leave thy merchandise,  
Thy churches and thy charities ;  
And leave thy peacock wit behind ;  
Enough for thee the primal mind  
That flows in streams, that breathes in wind.  
Leave all thy pedant lore apart ;  
God hid the whole world in thy heart."

Finally, the poem closes with the glorification of Creation itself as a process instead of a product—the survival of substances through fugitive forms ever on an ascending march, whereby

“ A divine improvisation,  
From the heart of God proceeds,  
A single will, a million deeds,



—even as we have the Upanishadic text, *Ekam roopam bahudha yah kṛoti*. Surely, a fitting conclusion this to what, in some aspects, is perhaps the most typical of Emerson's poems. And thus in lofty measure swells the inspired rhapsody—the revised *Magnifical* of the modern man of positive science and idealistic philosophy, declaring of the God of Nature,

“ the eternal Pan,  
Who layeth the world's incessant Plan,”

how

“ He is free and libertine,  
Pouring of his power the wine  
To every age, to every race ;  
...                      ...                      ...  
The world is the ring of his spells.  
And the play of his miracles.  
...                      ...                      ...  
He is the axis of the star;  
He is the sparkle of the spar ;  
He is the heart of every creature ;  
He is the meaning of every feature ;  
And his mind is the sky,  
Than all it holds more deep, more high.”

Like the famous *Tintern Abbey Lines* in the case of Wordsworth, the stanzas headed *Waldeinsankeit*, though set by no means to anything like the same high key, may be taken as, in a way, an epitome of Emerson's creed of practical mysticism in relation to Nature. Ardent, unwearied wanderer by the sea, in the forest, on the plain, up the mountain-crest and down the oaken glade—

"O what," he asks, "have I to do with time?" Sober joy, steadfast beauty, sweet harmony—these comprise the priceless possessions of Nature, mocking "cities of mortals woe-begone" "which no false art refines." And their "million spells" mean the perpetual enchantment of "souls that walk in pain," aye, the return of "immortal youth" "through times that wear, and forms that fade." But the condition precedent to this reaping of the "stern benefit" that abides in "the serious landscape lone" is the bringing to it of the open eye and the original mind—or, as defined in *The Prelude*, 'that first great gift, the vital soul.'

" See thou bring not to field or stone  
The fancies found in books;  
Leave authors' eyes, and fetch your own  
To brave the landscape's looks."

As the consummation of this rare discipline, the gospel rule of losing the lower to find the higher self is re-enforced in the pregnant words,

" Oblivion here thy wisdom is:  
Thy thrift the sleep of cares;  
For a proud idleness like this  
Crowns all thy mean affairs."

Accordingly, with Emerson it is no extravagance of fond fancy which avers, at the opening of that other little poem, **My Garden**,

" If I could put my woods in song,  
And tell what's there enjoyed,

All men would to my gardens throng,  
And leave the cities void."

Yes; did not Father Taylor, Chaplain to the Boston sailors, predict of Emerson, on his death, that the very presence of that heresiarch in Hell would surely transform its climate and turn the general tide of emigration thitherward from Heaven? Once again, the same old note is struck as to how Nature is vocal always and everywhere and man, alas, is deaf too often :

"Ever the words of the gods resound ;  
But the porches of man's ear  
Seldom in this low life's round  
Are unsealed, that he may hear;"

that is, in Wordsworth's phraseology,

'hear the mighty stream of tendency  
Uttering for elevation of our thought,  
A clear sonorous voice inaudible  
To the vast multitude.'<sup>1</sup>

All the same, Emerson assures us,

"Keen ears can catch a syllable,  
As if one spake to another,  
In the hemlocks tall, untameable,  
And what the whispering grasses smother."

For his part, likewise, Wordsworth, with "keen ears"—a rich perceptive sensibility no less rare than his creative imagination and leading even to

<sup>1</sup> *The Excursion*

an interchange of the overwrought senses—reports the self-same mystic experience when he says, ‘The grass you almost *hear* it growing,’<sup>1</sup> and makes the Forsaken Indian Woman say, ‘In sleep I *heard* the northern gleams.’<sup>2</sup> Thus, Emerson’s own profit and delight is to surround himself with such voices—“of one import, of varied tone”—speaking truly

“ what I cannot declare,  
Yet cannot all withhold:”

or, to turn again to Wordsworth,

‘ Authentic tidings of invisible things’  
imparted as to ‘a curious child’

‘applying to his ear  
The convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell;  
...                      ...                      ...  
Murmurings, whereby the monitor expressed  
Mysterious union with its native sea.’<sup>3</sup>

Next, passing on to Emerson’s treatment of specific aspects of Nature and judging broadly from the themes of the poems concerned, we note, first, how they include a fairly wide range of objects and occurrences—spring, among the seasons, described in *May-Day* and *April*; sea, hill, river and lake, among the elements, in *Sea-shore*, *Monadnoc*, *Two Rivers* and *Musketauit* and *The Adirondacs* respectively; and the rhodora among the flowers,

<sup>1</sup> *The Idiot Boy*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. ‘The breeze I see’ in *Her eyes are wild*

<sup>3</sup> *The Excursion*

the titmouse and the humble-bee among the winged creatures, and the snow-storm and berrying among the phenomena of natural life, in the several pieces named after them. These all reveal, more or less, an uncommon degree of sensitiveness to natural beauty and will always shine forth as precious gems in the casket of Nature-poems.

Of conspicuous value from the point of view of pure poetry as also of deep spirituality stands **May-Day** (published in 1867 after passing through a variety of permutations)—the biggest and perhaps also the bonniest child of Emerson's muse, to be likened only to the earlier *Woodnotes* and *Monadnoc* among its kind. Less overladen with philosophic moralising and less marred, too, by harshnesses and obscurities, while still retaining a certain want of symmetry and coherence, it represents the absolute revelry of the lover of Nature in her loveliest charms—her teeming life and boundless energy—together with, as Dr. Garnett points out, a more complete self-identification with that life and that energy. Its superb celebration of what is *par excellence* the season of the poets necessarily takes us back, for a like embodiment of true poetic qualities, to the poet of *The Seasons*. Emerson here combines the same exactness of portraiture with the same colouring of romance as Thomson, while he makes up for lesser gorgeousness of imagery by greater inwardness of interpretation.

How thoroughly Emerson is at home in this most congenial subject is at once made obvious by his characterisation of May-Day as

“ The vintage-day of field and wood,  
When magic wine for bards is brewed, ”

although, at the same time, he affirms “ there is not one of all the choir ” of bards “ can put in verse ” anything like an adequate realisation of its “ sights and voices ravishing.” The keynote of the inspiration is struck in the very opening line, christening spring as “ daughter of Heaven and Earth.” The rapture of interest swells through the exhibition of the series of hints, heralds and harbingers of spring—the air “ full of whistlings bland;” lake and stream unlocked from “ the iceberg cold;” the “ trumpet-lowing of the herds;”

“the calendar,  
Faiththful through a thousand years,  
Of the painted race”

of plant and flower, grass and tendril; and “ the choral glee ” of feathered songsters from the Southern Sea

“ under the pretty almanac  
Of the punctual coming-back.”

We hear how coy and tardy yet how sure and steady, after the *festina lente* method of all Nature’s movements, are the footsteps of spring.

We witness in her march "the temperance" of transition without any clean-cut cleavage but with that subtle interblending of the outgoing and the incoming which marks all cosmic processes. We behold her presence decked with "the wealth of forms, the flush of hues" and dowered with a creative and recreative power

"strong and virtuous,  
Broad-sowing, cheerful, plenteous,"

such as is possessed by nought else or none besides. As, in the outer world of appearance, she "maketh all things softly smile," so, in the inner world of impulse,

"A hid unruly appetite  
Of swifter life, a surer hope,  
Strains every sense to larger scope ;"

and

"Now desire of action wakes,  
And the wish to roam."

Altogether, the ineffable joy of the season—"joy shed in rosy waves abroad"—is pictured forth, in the true spirit of an epithalamium, as nothing short of the honeymoon joy of the

"Hymen of element and race,  
Knowing well to celebrate  
With song and hue and star and state,  
With tender light and youthful cheer,  
The spousals of the new-born year.  
Lo, Love's inundation poured  
Over space and race abroad !"

Nay, more. Inasmuch as bliss is ever the quintessence of beneficence and the prime principle of life itself, Wordsworth, for his part, knew that

‘ To every form of being is assigned

... ..

An *active* principle,’ <sup>1</sup>

that

‘ every flower

Enjoys the air it breathes,’ <sup>2</sup>

and that all true joy—‘joy in widest commonalty spread’—is joy of the spirit, spiritual; and he found in the joy of Nature her

‘ function apostolical

In peace fulfilling,’

like his ‘sweet Daisy,’ an agency of edification and an assurance of immortality. So, too, Emerson ever realised and here helps us finally to realise how this joy, resounding in what Dr. Garnett terms ‘the general frolic of dithyrambic joy,’ ‘flows from the heart of Love, the Lord,’ and is potent enough to

“ Soothe pain, and age, and love’s distress,

Fire fainting will, and build heroic minds,”

as well as to teach

“ the grand recoil

Of life resurgent from the soil

Wherein was dropped the mortal spoil.”

<sup>1</sup> *The Excursion*

<sup>2</sup> *Lines written in Early Spring*



Hence, quite worthy of the poem in its high praise of the ministrations of spring is the conclusion, which we cannot resist the temptation to cite. As the germ of the whole idea (not, of course, by way of conscious indebtedness) may perhaps be noted Milton's dainty little *Song on May Morning* with its salutation to 'flowery May' and 'her green lap':

' Hail, bounteous May, that dost inspire  
Mirth, and youth, and warm desire !  
Woods and groves are of thy dressing,  
Hill and dale doth boast thy blessing.'

And here is, so to say, Emerson's glowing amplification of the text :

" For thou, O Spring, canst renovate  
All that high God did first create.  
Be still his arm and architect,  
Rebuild the ruin, mend defect ;  
Chemist to vamp old worlds with new,  
Coat sea and sky with heavenlier blue,  
New-tint the plumage of the birds,  
And slough decay from grazing herds,  
Sweep ruins from the scarped mountain,  
Cleanse the torrent at the fountain,  
Purge alpine air by towns defiled,  
Bring to fair mother fairer child,  
Not less renew the heart and brain,  
Scatter the sloth, wash out the stain,  
Make the aged eye sun-clear,  
To parting soul bring grandeur near.  
Under gentle types, my Spring  
Masks the might of Nature's king,

An energy that searches thorough  
From chaos to the dawning morrow ;  
Into all our human plight,  
The soul's pilgrimage and flight ;  
In city or in solitude,  
Step by step, lifts bad to good,  
Without halting, without rest,  
Lifting Better up to Best ;  
Planting seeds of knowledge pure,  
Through earth to ripen, through heaven endure."

Such is Emerson's spiritual conception of spring as the earthly type of the renovation of the soul.

*May-Day* has already been specially commended for the close observation and the rich imagination that find unlimited scope "in new landscapes of romance" opened out by the subject. And now, we would add that the appreciation of this poem might be set up as a not unjust measure of any capacity for the enjoyment of true poetry. We have in it brilliant passages most poetically conceived. There is, for instance, the description of the genial warmth of May under the image of "the deluge of the heat," as though in elaboration of Gray's condensed phrase, 'the liquid noon,' employed in a similar context in his own *Ode on the Spring*. There is, again, the portrayal of the "daily onward" march of spring "to greet (the) staid ancient cavaliers" of "Night and Day, and Day and Night," and resuscitate those eternal forms out of their winter-deformity. There is,

lastly, the reproduction of "the mystic tone" of the wind-harp trembling to "cosmic breath" and proving truth sweeter far than art. As for minor and detached poetic images, only a few gathered up at random from among a variety of arresting ones will suffice to illustrate how exquisitely the nakedness of fact can be robed "in fancy weeds" and with what pleasing effect. Consider, for example, how the common is lifted from the commonplace in the sight-picture,

"Frog and lizard in holiday coats  
And turtle brave in his golden spots;"

or in the sound-note,

"Convent-chanting which the child  
Hears pealing from the panther's cave;"

or, again, in the action-impulse,

"The pebble loosed from the frost  
Asks of the urchin to be tost."

Note, too, how spring is said to

"Hold a cup with cowslip wreaths,  
Whence a smokeless incense breathes;"

and what is referred to as

"the topmost spire,  
Which for a spike of tender green  
Bartered its powdery cap."

It remains to observe, in passing, how in this poem we come across several single lines full of the fascination lent by a delicate sense of sound-effects in alliterative and epigrammatic structure—lines that must linger in the memory, linked to analogous ones from familiar sources.

“ The wheat-blade whispers of the sheaf.”

“ Here weave your chamber weather-proof.”

“ A world-wide wave with a foaming edge  
That rims the running silver sheet.”

“ Words of pain and cries of fear,  
But pillowed all on melody,  
As fits the griefs of bards to be.”

“ And billows on the long beach break.”

Lines these with quite a Tennysonian flavour of diction, the last-noted particularly recalling the verse in *In Memoriam*,

‘ On the bald street breaks the blank day.’

Likewise, it cannot be a far cry from the couplet,

“ Only to children children sing,  
Only to youth will spring be spring,”

to Goldsmith’s line,

‘ The sports of children satisfy the child.’

Only, the effective appeal with its peculiar freshness and force points here to a sublimer plane of unsophisticated sensibility.

A sort of small appendix to the foregoing poem is **April**, summing up the charms of the season that can "thrill our tuneful frames,"

"Can cozen, pique, and flatter,  
Can parley and provoke"

—its magical winds, passionate walks and gemmed hedges, watery dimples and leafy shades, aerial Cupids and fairy Rosamund-clews—and leading on to the ever-iterated expostulation,

"Down with your doleful problems.  
And court the sunny brook.  
The south-winds are quick-witted,  
The schools are sad and slow,  
The masters quite omitted  
The lore we care to know."

If, as Emerson holds, "In flint and marble beats a heart" and "speaks all languages the rose,"<sup>1</sup> it cannot be that the eternal sea and the everlasting hills, in all God's creation, have no message for one like him. Rather, as in the next two poems, would he proclaim with Wordsworth,

"Two voices are there; one is of the sea,  
One of the mountains; each a mighty voice."<sup>2</sup>

And so, as to the former, he hears and reproduces for us its "chiding" voice of potent ministration in the poem, **Sea-shore**. No apostrophe this from

<sup>1</sup> *May-Day*

<sup>2</sup> *Thought of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland*

man to the Sea, such as is generally known to marine poetry, however majestic, as in Byron—awe-inspired at his own insignificance before its presence, ‘boundless, endless and sublime’—but an address from the Sea to the soul with a claim for “arts and sorceries,” an offer of asylum and a call to communion.

“ Am I not always here. thy summer home?  
Is not my voice thy music, morn and eve?  
My breath thy healthful climate in the heats,  
My touch thy antidote, my bay thy bath?  
Was ever building like my terraces?  
Was ever couch magnificent as mine?”

And in the self-revelation of this plenitude of strength, beauty and freshness, well does the Sea belaud itself as

“ full of food, the nourisher of kinds,  
Purger of earth. and medicine of men;  
Creating a sweet climate by my breath,  
Washing out harms and griefs from memory.  
And, in my mathematic ebb and flow,  
Giving a hint of that which changes not ”

—giving it, that is, to such ‘ a silent poet ’ as ‘ the solitude of the vast sea ’ endows, in Wordsworth’s view, with

‘ a watchful heart  
Still couchant, an inevitable ear,  
And an eye practised like a blind man’s touch.’ <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Attractions of the Busy World*

Then, from the beautiful mountain-poem, *Monadnoc*, named after "Cheshire's haughty hill," we discern how, as acknowledged by Wordsworth, self-styled 'a stripling of the hills,'<sup>1</sup> the poetic-philosophic temper feels nowhere more at home than in the element of

' mountain solitudes,  
Within whose solemn temple I received  
My earliest visitations.'<sup>2</sup>

The admonition of the Pine-Tree to the poet in *Woodnotes* was, "Go burn thy wormy pages." Now, likewise, in the reproof,

" Bookworm, break this sloth urbane;  
A greater spirit bids thee forth  
Than the grey dreams which thee detain,"

he hears "the summoning voice" of enchantment from the hoary heights. To them he hies forth, impelled by a "thousand minstrels" within and invited by "gayest pictures" without. There, amid the ravishment of the "mysteries of colour daily laid" "for bard, for lover, and for saint," of "the mystic seasons' dance" and of the "wondrous craft of plant and stone" "thawing snow drift into flowers," he pours forth in soft Lydian airs his praise of the mountain and the mountaineers.

" To far eyes, an aerial isle  
Unploughed, which finer spirits pile "

<sup>1</sup> *The Prelude*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

is the pretty picture of the mountain—at all events, a Titan heeding “ his sky-affairs ” and, at the same time,

“ The people’s pride, the country’s core,  
Inspirer, prophet evermore.”

As for the mountain folk, through their disappointingly “ sordid weeds ” of present squalor and dulness, they yet reveal how

“ Close hid in those rough guises lurk  
Western Magians,”

to be “ well embodied, well ensouled ” in God’s good time. Even as it is, those “ rude poets of the tavern hearth ”—how full of real edification they are with the simple cunning of their language and of hearty entertainment, too, with the straightforward humour of their “ unquoted mirth ! ”

It is clear how close we are brought to the wonderful atmosphere of Wordsworth’s Highland experiences of Nature and of Life. In the last analysis, these experiences resolve, in both versions, into well-nigh the same constituents of consciousness. Firstly, the calm, continued communicativeness of Nature, as indicated by Emerson in the words—

“ Seemed to me, the towering hill  
Was not altogether still,  
But a quiet sense conveyed.”



Secondly, Nature's craving for the constant companionship of Man—

“ And leavest thou thy lowland race,  
Here amid clouds to stand,  
And wouldst be my companion,  
Where I gaze and still shall gaze  
Through tempering nights and flushing days? ”

Thirdly, community of nature alone the condition of communion in spirit —

“ Ah! welcome, if thou bring  
My secret in thy brain;

Each can only take his own.”

Fourthly, the blessedness of recompense in the freest promise of perfect illumination—“ the smile of Reason beaming ” “ through the granite seeming,”

“ For the world was built in order,  
And the atoms march in tune;  
Rhyme the pipe, and Time the warder,”

—a manifestation of the true being of Nature in Thought and Harmony; the Mount of Transfiguration revealing the transfiguration of the mount, so that

“ these grey crags  
Not on crags are hung  
But beads are of a rosary  
On prayer and music strung.”

Fifthly, Nature's profound acknowledgment of Man's infinite superiority and supremacy over herself—

“ But well I know, no mountain can  
 Measure with a perfect man.  
 For it is on zodiacs writ,  
 Adamant is soft to wit;  
 And when the greater comes again  
 With my secret in his brain,  
 I shall pass, as glides my shadow  
 Daily over hill and meadow.  
 ...                    ...                    ...  
 I await the bard and sage,  
 Who, in large thoughts, like fair pearl-seed,  
 Shall string Monadnoc like a bead.  
 Comes that cheerful troubadour,  
 This mound shall throb his face before.”

Here follows the concluding exposition, through the voice of the mountain, of how ‘ we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.....For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.’<sup>1</sup>  
 Now, pale and frightened, man is but a

“ poor parasite,  
 Cooped in a ship he cannot steer,—  
 Who is the captain he knows not,  
 Port or pilot trows not,—  
 Risk or ruin he must share.”

<sup>1</sup> *I Corinthians*, xiii

And the earth itself,

“ Whereon ye sail,  
 Tumbling steep  
 In the uncontinented deep,  
 ...                      ...                      ...  
 Thoughtless of its anxious freight,  
 Plunges eyeless on forever.”

But, *then*, man shall enter upon his inheritance—

“ Best of Pan’s immortal meat,  
 Bread to eat, and juice to drink ;  
 So the thoughts that he shall think  
 Shall not be forms of stars, but stars,  
 Not pictures pale, but Jove and Mars.”

One marked difference, however, between Wordsworth and Emerson is to be found in their respective estimates of the conditions of human life upon the hills. The former’s favourite swain is only the idealised object of his own imaginative love in whom the sorry limitations of the actual are wholly melted away. On the other hand, the latter’s “highland breed” are but the raw material of the ideal manhood that is to be ; and to them only at their best would apply Pope’s characterisation of man in general as ‘a being darkly wise and rudely great.’ The patient search among “many forms of mountain men” “for God’s vicegerency and stead”—for

“ the patriots  
 In whom the stock of freedom roots”

and for "a minstrel seed"—has, we are told, led,  
after all, to the sad sigh,

“ Woe is me for my hope’s downfall !”

And this is promptly followed up with the solemn wish,

“ But if the brave old mould is broke,  
And end in churls the mountain folk,  
In tavern cheer and tavern joke,  
Sink, O mountain, in the swamp !  
Hide in thy skins, O sovereign lamp !  
Perish like leaves, the highland breed !  
No sire survive, nor son succeed !”

At the same time, revived hope soon recognises in them votaries of the virtues of "toil's hard hap"—

"men of bone, and good at need,  
... ..  
Coarse and boisterous, yet mild,  
Strong as giant, slow as child"

—forefathers, indeed, of “a finer race.” Sixthly and lastly, as to the content itself of the Sermon of the Mount. It will be observed, in the first place, that the appearances and alternations, the variations and vicissitudes, of natural objects and occurrences amidst the opposite phenomena of flux and fixity have only one identical lesson to impart to the poet. It is that they all are, in the transcendental terminology of *The Prelude*, but

‘ workings of one mind, the features  
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree ;

Characters of the great Apocalypse,  
 The types and symbols of Eternity,  
 Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.'

As the heaving sea, with its tidal undulations, has suggested to Emerson the image of the Immutable, so the steadfast mountain, in its turn, stands before him the

" grand expresser of the present tense,  
 And type of permanence,  
 Firm ensign of the fatal Being."

It symbolises

" the stable good  
 For which we all our lifetime grope  
 In shifting form the formless mind,  
 And though the substance us elude,  
 We in thee the shadow find."

Again,

" Hither we bring  
 Our insect miseries to the rocks ;  
 And the whole flight, with pestering wing,  
 Vanish, and end their murmuring,—  
 Vanish beside these dedicated blocks,  
 Which who can tell what mason laid ?"

" These dedicated blocks "—notice, by the way, how the very phrase rings like a coin from the mint of Wordsworth ! Further,

" We fool and prate ;  
 Thou art silent and sedate."

And once more,

“Thou dost supply  
The shortness of our days,  
And promise, on thy Founder's truth,  
Long morrow to this mortal youth.”

Thus, unveiling the permanent behind the passing, ministering comfort amid care and calamity, rebuking the vanity of gabble into the wisdom of silence and pledging a deathless hereafter for the departing soul, the “mute orator” sheds upon Emerson, as well as Wordsworth, that ‘healing power’ which Matthew Arnold found in Wordsworth's poetry and which Wordsworth himself imbibed from Nature.

‘The unremitting voice of nightly streams  
That wastes so oft, we think, its tuneful powers  
...                      ...                      ...  
Wants not a healing influence that can creep  
Into the human breast, and mix with sleep  
To regulate the motion of our dreams  
For kindly issues.’

So sang Wordsworth by his own ‘tuneful powers.’ And so, too, Emerson, touching the same particular phase and ‘power’ of Nature, in the short piece entitled **Two Rivers**, which, with its golden tinge of mysticism, is far from a descriptive poem on the Musketaquid, a stream across his own woodland property over Concord Plain. All too familiar he was, indeed, with its “summer voice” repeating “the music of the rain” with the swell

of its periodic inundations and with the "jewels gay" shaped out of "shard and flint" by this "goblin strong." And what keen captivation they exercised over him is evident from the lines (in this poem),

" They lose their grief who hear his song,  
And where he winds is the day of day,"

as also more explicitly from the lines (in another poem to be presently dealt with),

" I bathe in the morn's soft and silvered air,  
And loiter willing by yon loitering stream."

Yet, the prophet of the Over-Soul would convey no mere outward impressions. He must needs penetrate through the fleeting folds of the phenomenal and discover for himself the indwelling Under-Soul—flow within flow, overflow beyond overflow, melody behind melody and marvel beneath marvel—a remarkable counterpart, in the outer world, to the inner states of him who avowed,

' often do I seem  
Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself  
And of some other Being.'<sup>1</sup>

And thus we are prepared for the concluding touch,

" So forth and brighter fares my stream.  
Who drinks it shall not thirst again ;

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth : *The Prelude*

No darkness stains its equal gleam,  
And ages drop in it like rain."

This glimpse of Nature-mysticism through a transparent allegory is significant as a scintillation of the secret that binds the faculties of the seer to the forces of Nature, the inmost within reaching out to the innermost without

"Through years through men, through nature fleet,  
Through passion, thought, through power and dream."

The "slender and sluggish stream" of the **Musketaquid**, occupying in Emerson's life-furniture the place of the Derwent in Wordsworth's youthful environment, provides inspiration for another poem named after itself. This latter is of interest, not alone through the picturesqueness of its landscape-painting, including the visit of the spring to the valley, the breaking away of the clouds, the concert of the birds "far off and nearer," the onward ride of

the sun of May ;

And wide around, the marriage of the plants"

and the flow of "the surge of summer's beauty," together with the pine-house dwellings and the elemental doings of the farmers "beneath low hills"—all, all "touched with genius," so much so that

"Yonder ragged cliff

Has thousand faces in a thousand hours."

Living not far from that anchorite-author of America, Thoreau—"far the most remarkable," as Lowell aptly calls him, 'among the pistillate



plants kindled to fruitage by the Emersonian pollen' <sup>1</sup>—the editing of whose works has been made a labour of love by Emerson, the latter describes how, amid the simple loveliness of his own home and haunts and habits,

“ The partial wood-gods overpaid my love,  
 And granted me the freedom of their state,  
 ...                      ...                      ...  
 And through my solitary, rock-like wont  
 Shot million rays of thought and tenderness.”

Here is what he depicts of himself and his life with Nature :

“ The gentle deities  
 Showed me the lore of colours and of sounds,  
 The innumerable tenements of beauty,  
 The miracle of generative force,  
 Far-reaching concords of astronomy  
 Felt in the plants, and in the punctual birds;  
 Better, the linked purpose of the whole,  
 And, chiefest prize, found I true liberty  
 In the glad home plain-dealing nature gave  
 The polite found me impolite ; the great  
 Would mortify me, but in vain ; for still  
 I am a willow of the wilderness,  
 Loving the wind that bent me. All my hurts  
 My garden spade can heal. A woodland walk,  
 A quest of river-grapes, a mocking thrush,  
 A wild-rose, or rock-loving columbine,  
 Salve my worst wounds.  
 For thus the wood-gods murmured in my ear ;  
 ‘ Dost love our manners ? Canst thou silent lie ? ’ ”

<sup>1</sup> *My Study Windows*

**The Adirondacs** is professedly the journal of a lake-excursion in 1858—"ten men, ten guides, our company all told." And to these fellow-travellers it stands dedicated with a cheery compliment :

"Chaucer had no such worthy crew,  
Nor Boccace in Decameron."

The piece tells, first, of the marches made, the scenes witnessed and the occupations enjoyed on the physical side, together with the awkwardnesses of the scholars and the adroitnesses of the churls. To this extent, the medium of verse for the narrative seems resorted to as though in sympathetic adoption of the theory behind *Peter Bell* and *The Idiot Boy*. But, as the sketch proceeds to recount the "visitings of graver thought," which is quite in the element of the author's genius, a rise from the flats of prose to the altitudes of poetry is distinctly recognised. It must be by virtue of this elevation alone that John Morley, is prepared to include *The Adirondacs* among the few memorable poetic productions of one for whose muse he has but a slim laurel. The essence of the deeper and calmer experiences of "this Oreads' fended Paradise" was, of course, one with the universal perception of that type of true seer who finds in Nature the confidant and preceptor of the individual soul ; namely, that all her relationships

are personal, all her realities symbolical and all her revelations spiritual.

“ Judge with what sweet surprises Nature spoke  
 To each apart, lifting her lovely shows  
 To spiritual lessons pointed home  
 And as through dreams in watches of the night,  
 So through all creatures in their form and ways  
 Some mystic hint accosts the vigilant,  
 Not clearly voiced, but waking a new sense  
 Inviting to new knowledge, one with old.  
 Hark to that petulant chirp ! what ails the warbler?  
 Mark his capricious ways to draw the eye.  
 Now soar again. What wilt thou, restless bird,  
 Seeking in that chaste blue a bluer light,  
 Thirsting in that pure for a purer sky ? ”

This thought of the unquenchable aspiration of the finite towards the infinite,

‘ Still to be courted—never to be won,’ <sup>1</sup>

the poet finds writ large upon every entity, as our own Rabindranath, in the *Sadhana* discourses notes how the brook murmurs, ‘ I go, I go,’ while it rushes onward to the sea. The counterpart is also met with on all sides in the besetting summonses from Beyond.

“ Daily the bending skies solicit man,  
 The seasons chariot him from this exile.

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth: *The Excursion*

The rainbow hours bedeck his glowing chair,  
The storm-winds urge the heavy weeks along,  
Suns haste to set, that so remoter lights  
Beckon the wanderer to his vaster home."

And then, how few the deep-souled spirits that can speak out of the tranquillity of their own souls, drawing upon inner verities to illumine and illustrate outer conditions, as Emerson does in the words,

" the air serene,  
So like the soul of me, what if 'twere me ? " !

Here the analogy, rather, the affinity, between the natural and the spiritual gets carried so far as to suggest even identity from the view-point of monistic idealism !

Next follows a glowing account—as in Tennyson's *Locksley Hall*, of the anticipations in many lines, so here—of the accomplishment in one line, of scientific triumph. " Thought's new-found path " in " the wire-cable laid beneath the sea " is hailed as a " glad miracle," a " feat of wit," the exciting report of which, amid " loud, exulting cries " of " delight and wonder," suddenly found its way to the " little fleet " of " cruising skiffs " on the foaming waters through " a printed journal " " caught from a late arriving traveller." Nay, all the elements round about that solitude—" gray rock and cedar grove and cliff and lake," " echoing caves " and " faint day-moon " and " yon thundertops "—joined visibly in the outburst of acclaim,

" as if we told the fact  
 To ears intelligent ; ... ..  
 ... ..  
 As if we men were talking in a vein  
 Of sympathy so large that ours was theirs."

It is the same beneficent miracle of practical, positive science that finds grateful glorification, in the same year, through Whittier's Cable Hymn in *The Tent of the Beach*, reminiscent of a like 'poetical picnic' and jubilant, in particular, over the prospective interlinking of nation to nation by the newly contrived 'swift shuttle of the Lord' as it shall go on and on to weave

“ The bridal robe of earth’s accord,  
The funeral shroud of war ! ”

Thus the fruitful holidays wore on to a happy close as " the gay celerities of art " in " Beethoven's notes " streamed " from a long cabin "

“on the verge  
Of craggy Indian wilderness,”

and turned homeward the thoughts and steps of the joyful excursionists. Accordingly, the poem concludes with an aptly extended rendering of the good old charms music hath to soothe the savage breast :

“ Well done !...the bear is kept at bay,  
The lynx, the rattle-snake, the flood, the fire ;  
All the fierce enemies, ague, hunger, cold,  
This thin spruce roof, this clayed log-wall,  
This wild plantation will suffice to chase.”

Of the poetic merit of the little flower-poem on **The Rhodora** suffice it to say it finds appreciation on all hands as not only exquisite in thought and elevating in tone but faultless in form so far as to make it, in Dr. Garnett's phrase, 'worthy of the Greek Anthology.'

The delicate rosy flower commonly known as the rhododendron and noted for the peculiarity of its growth in damp, woody places and in advance of the leaves—"spreading its leafless blooms in a damp nook"—is herein furnished with a truly beautiful explanation for being thus born to blush unseen and waste its sweetness on the desert air.

"Rhodora ! if the sages ask thee why,

... ..

Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for seeing,  
Then Beauty is its own excuse for being."

Here, indeed, is the meeting-point of æsthetics and ethics, once indicated by Marcus Aurelius when, meditating upon the incentive to pure living and well-doing, he found sufficient *motif* in the reflection that virtue was its own inducement and 'we ought to do good to others as simply and naturally as a horse runs, or a bee makes honey, or a vine bears grapes.' 'What more dost thou want,' the Stoic Emperor asked himself, 'when thou hast done a service to another ? Art thou not content to have done an act conformable to thy nature, and must thou seek to be paid for it, as if the eye demanded a reward for seeing or the feet for walk-

ing ?' <sup>1</sup> Or, as Wordsworth 'made reply' to his 'good friend Matthew' (the old Head-master at Hawkshead),

'The eye—it cannot choose but see ;  
We cannot bid the ear be still ;  
Our bodies feel, where'er they be,  
Against or with our will.

'Nor less I deem that there are Powers  
Which of themselves our minds impress.' <sup>2</sup>

Then, after the manner of Tennyson's approach to the 'flower in the crannied wall,' we are presented, in closing, with the following lines steeped in the wisdom of nescience :—

"Why wert thou there, O rival of the rose ?  
I never thought to ask, I never knew ;  
But, in my simple ignorance, suppose  
The self-same Power that brought me there  
brought you."

The two pieces on **The Titmouse** and **The Humble-Bee** show with what abandon the austere philosopher can throw himself into the soft sentiment of animated being in bird and insect. He is sweetly enamoured of them ; and on the principle, "'Tis good-will makes intelligence," he studies their ways with tender interest. Tiny little creatures that they are, he draws unmixed pleasure and profit from them, holding as he does that "no virtue

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Farrar : *Seekers after God*

<sup>2</sup> *Expostulation and Reply*

goes with size ; ” and he dotes on them with grateful affection.

The titmouse, “ this atom in full breath,” by its valorous frolickings and pipings “ out of sound heart and merry throat ” amid the “ arctic cold ” of January “ in the snow-choked wood,” administers to Emerson “ the antidote of fear,” so that

“ Henceforth I prize thy wiry chant  
O’er all that mass and minster vaunt.”

It is to be noted, however, that, beyond this bare hint, one is only reduced to guessing as to what it is actually that the bird does for the poet. Matthew Arnold, therefore, adduces this poem as an illustration of the lack of plainness, concreteness and evolution in Emerson’s poetry. Cowper or Burns, he adds, would certainly make something different out of the like kind of incident.

Again, with cunningly linked apostrophes of lavish love, the imploration to the humble-bee, “ animated torrid zone,” runs thus :

“ Where thou art is clime for me.  
... ..  
Keep me nearer, me thy hearer,  
... ..  
Wait, I prithee, till I come  
Within earshot of thy hum.”

To Emerson its “ mellow, breezy bass ” is a joy in itself that

“ Tells of countless sunny hours,  
Long days, and solid banks of flowers ;



Of gulfs of sweetness without bound  
 In Indian wildernesses found ;  
 Of Syrian peace, immortal leisure,  
 Firmest cheer, and bird-like pleasure."

Aye, more :

" Wiser far than human seer,  
 Yellow-breeched philosopher !  
 Seeing only what is fair,  
 Sipping only what is sweet,  
 Thou dost mock at fate and care,  
 Leave the chaff, and take the wheat.  
 ...                      ...                      ...  
 Want and woe, which torture us,  
 Thy sleep makes ridiculous."

Altogether, this poem on the Humble-Bee, flowing with liquid melody in fitting lyric measure and jewelled with softly radiant touches of natural description—as of " the south wind in May days " —approves itself as one of the finest of its kind, both by the beauty of its structure and the daintiness of its substance.

Though ethically the least significant of Emerson's poems yet worthy of note for the accuracy of its observation, *The Snow-Storm* offers, in the small compass of one continued metaphor, a brilliantly descriptive picture of " the north wind's masonry " and " the frolic architecture of the snow." It contrasts with Thomson's well-known delineation in setting out the fine effects (indoors and out-of-doors), rather than the fierce energies, of " the mad wind's night-work."

After Wordsworth's *Nutting*, which records, first,

‘ that sweet mood when pleasure loves to pay  
Tribute to ease, ’

and, next, a supervening ‘ sense of pain ’ at ‘ the mutilated bower ’ of the ‘ spirit in the woods,’ the piece titled **Berrying** hints the efficacy of a banquet of blackberry fruits in inducing “ pleasant fancies ” and enchanting dreams against a mood of cynical pessimism. Earth, by all the plenty and variety of her “ Ethiops sweet,” cures the jaundiced view that

“ Earth’s a howling wilderness,  
Truculent with fraud and force.”

One more poem, the **Song of Nature**, remains to complete the group of Nature-poems. It properly serves, so to say, as a bridge of transition between Emerson’s poetry of Nature and his poetry of Man. It is the utterance of the all-comprehending, all-evolving Spirit of Nature, in consonance with the testimony of Mount Monadnoc, already dwelt upon, to the effect that, if Nature is great, Man is greater still. The whole story of evolution, with the exhaustless resources and the endless renovations along ‘ the process of the suns,’ is portrayed as a “ travail in pain ” for the birth of “ the man-child ”—the uprising of Browning’s ‘ spark in the clod.’

“ I tire of globes and races,  
Too long the game is played ;  
What without him is summer's pomp  
Or winter's frozen shade ? ”

And so, as, plane over plane, “ the ancient elements ” seethe and simmer into emergence up to “ the summit of the whole ” from the sub-human to the human, the one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves is discerned to be the perfecting of the image of ideal humanity in that universal man who shall leap over all limits of time and space.

“ Let war and trade and creeds and song  
Blend, ripen race on race.  
The sunburnt world a man shall breed  
Of all the zones, and countless days. ”

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## CHAPTER VII

### POEMS OF INDIVIDUAL LIFE

We are now in a position to enter upon the study of the group of poems concerned with the philosophy of man as reached through introspection and experience—first, on the metaphysical, and, next, on the moral side.

As the paramountcy of man, noticed already, arises out of the acceptance of spirit as the only reality, coupled with the conviction of the unity of mind in both Man and Nature; so it leaves room, in the wide world, for nothing that is strictly not human, nothing that is not tinged and tintured with mind. Hence alone, according to Emerson, the intelligibility of Nature to Man, its changeability with every shifting point of view, its phenomenality within conscious experience, its plasticity in the service of the ideal. And hence, too, the resolvability of the moral and religious life of the race into one long pageant of triumphant spirit.

#### A—Metaphysical

With its peculiarly Hebrew device of the rhyme of thought apart from verbal rhyme and rhythm, the poem entitled **The Sphinx** tells how all things in the “Daedalian plan” emanate from man and converge, too, in man and how of every

quest he is the ultimate goal as also the starting-point. "Known fruit of the unknown," "clothed eternity," he is at once the subject and the object of knowledge. Aye, "Thou art the unanswered question"—

"The fate of the man-child;  
The meaning of man."

The eternal Sphinx with drowsy eye and heavy ear and furred wing is no other than "thy spirit, yoke-fellow." And he is the poet, the *Ædipus*, among the children of men who is able, "aloud and cheerfully," to scan the mystery of love as the hidden meaning of "the pictures of time"—love working

"at the centre,  
Heart-heaving alway"

—and of "love of the Best" as "the fiend that man harries" along his "aye-rolling orbit" to which "no goal will arrive." The secret being thus unmasked, the Sphinx uprises with merry satisfaction and, crouching "no more in stone," dissolves into the essence of all the elements—the Sphinx which, indeed, figures as a recurring symbol before Emerson, the subtle seer into the enigma of existence, as the Phoenix does before Carlyle, the fiery prophet of the palingenesis of society.

Accordingly, it is in relation to this purely idealistic and individualistic doctrine of "every man's condition being a solution in hieroglyphics to those inquiries he would put"<sup>1</sup>—the doctrine, in fine, of man as himself the question, himself the questioner and himself the answerer; centre and circumference, all in one and all in all—that we construe the teaching of the lines headed **Experience**.

" Little man, least of all,  
 Among the legs of his guardians tall,  
 Walked about with puzzled look,  
 Him by the hand dear Nature took,  
 Dearest Nature, strong and kind,  
 Whispered, ' Darling, never mind !  
 Tomorrow they will wear another face,  
 The founder thou; these be thy race ! ' "

Thus, whatever enslaving lordships, apparent contradictions and unnatural discords force themselves upon experience, they are, in the long run and in the inevitable economy of things, bound to find subjugation, reconciliation and harmony only in and through wider experience, the term, however, standing all along for something far removed from mere empiricism.

Further, as experience is always the experience of reality, the Nominalist, as we gather from the lines on **Nominalist and Realist**, has no more place in the scheme of things than the Empiricist. In the Philosophy of 'Values,' the Nominalist's

<sup>1</sup> Tract on *Nature*

standard is 'the name,' the first sheath (according to *Sartor*) that shrouds the soul from the sight. To this 'facile psychology,' for which the rose is all in the 'name,' are opposed the philosophic mind and the child heart—the 'mind' that spies out the one permanent behind the manifold transient and the 'heart' that spells out the perpetually precious within the recurring commonplace. First, for example, in the ascending scale of the mineral, the vegetable and the human,

"In countless upward-striving waves  
The moon-drawn tide-wave strives;  
In thousand far-transplanted grafts  
The parent fruit survives;  
So, in the new-born millions,  
The perfect Adam lives."

Next,

"Not less are summer-mornings dear  
To every child they wake,  
And each with novel life his sphere  
Fills for his proper sake."

While, of course, it forms the very background of all Emerson's teaching and reflects itself through all his writings, the main lines of this position stand rallied together and reinforced in a few particular poems severally named after savants of an elder time and presumably suggested by the sympathetic study and contemplation of their word and work.

The basic unity and uniformity of Nature beneath the manifold and the multiplex—this is

the lesson of the poem bearing the name of **Xenophanes** after the famous founder of the Eleatic school of philosophy.

“ Bird, beast and flower,  
Song, picture, form, space, thought, and character,  
Deceive us, seeming to be many things,  
And are but one ”

—one in substance, one in pattern. In proof thereof,

“ To know one element, explore another  
And in the second reappears the first.  
The specious panorama of a year  
But multiplies the image of a day,—  
A belt of mirrors round a taper's flame ;  
And universal Nature, through her vast  
And crowded whole, an infinite paroquet,  
Repeats one note.”

What is it, then, that recognises the sameness through the separateness and reconciles the two together ? This, it is added, is the mind, of which all are but reflections and reproductions.

“ Behold far off, they part  
As God and devil ; bring them to the mind,  
They dull its edge with their monotony.”

Again, “Everything is kin of mine” is the keynote of the stanzas put into the mouth of **Mithridates** the Great—the essential oneness of Man and Nature embracing all seeming opposites through



“all zones and altitudes” “from the earth-poles to the line.” So that, if the spirit would not be

“ Too long shut in strait and few,  
Thinly dieted on dew,”

it must realise its own vital affinities in respect of element and experience and demonstrate the practical reciprocities of that realisation. It must say, on the one hand,

“ I will use the world, and sift it,  
To a thousand humours shift it,”

and, on the other,

“ Hither ! take me, use me, fill me,  
Vein and artery, though ye kill me !”

“ O all you virtues, methods, mights,  
Means, appliances, delights,  
Reputed wrongs and braggart rights,  
Smug routine, and things allowed,  
Minorities, things under cloud !”

Lastly, one other corollary to the above on the same practical side of man's proper attitude towards Nature and Society is enunciated in the “sound advice” conveyed in another poem in the name of *Alphonso the Wise of Castile*.

The crying evil of the time—the growing deterioration of things in kind—

“ The general debility ;  
Of genius the sterility ; ”

—as witness “puny man and scentless rose”—this is first vividly depicted in the picture of how, under the conditions of modern life and civilisation so-called,

“mortals miss the loyal heats,  
Which drove them erst to social feats ;  
Now, to a savage selfness grown,  
Think nature barely serves for one ;  
With science poorly mask their hurt,  
And vex the gods with question pert,  
Inmensely curious whether you  
Still are rulers, or mildew.”

And then, as the needed antidote to this discrediting of “Adamhood,” the essentials of perfect self-realisation are emphasised as consisting in free-self-surrender to the common life of all, as if the one existed only for the many, and also in full self-subsistence upon the ample plenitude of all, as though, again, the many existed only for the one. A view-point this coincident with that of Blake the Mystic on the twofold aspect of Love, ‘which seeketh not itself to please’ and also, equally truly, ‘seeketh itself alone to please.’ Here are the corresponding injunctions in Emerson : First,

“ I have thought it thoroughly over,—  
State of hermit, state of lover ;  
We must have society,  
We cannot spare variety.”

And this is so, because variety, as pointed out in another short piece, **The Three Dimensions**, is that

in which "the opening mind" finds increasing room for itself, as the spheres first found it for themselves in "the ample sky" and as "the new mankind" did later in "the oath of liberty." Again, with grim humour,

"My counsel is, kill nine in ten,  
And bestow the shares of all  
On the remnant decimal.  
Add their nine lives to this cat ;  
Stuff their nine brains in his hat ;  
Make his frame and forces square  
With the labours he must dare."

**Blight** is another significantly-named poem, containing a more trenchant indictment of the blatant, blasting blindness of the shallow, insensate scientific temper in this vaunted age of progress with its pampering of the flesh and starving of the soul, its engrossment in things and disregard of men and, worse, its entanglement in names and forgetfulness of things—altogether, a dire and dreadful plight such as justly to bring down upon itself the classic condemnation of 'blind mouths.'<sup>1</sup> This poem, both by structure and by sentiment, might well make a leaf out of the volume of Wordsworth's works—a continuation, say, of the sonnet, 'The world is too much with us.' It is directly reminiscent of other masters as well of the nineteenth century 'renaissance of wonder' in cer-

<sup>1</sup> Milton : *Lycidas* (with Ruskin's comment in *Sesame and Lilies*)

tain of its touches. For example, it recalls Carlyle in the insistence on realities :

“Give me truths ;  
For I am weary of the surfaces,  
And die of inanition.”

It recalls Tennyson in the regard for little things like the ‘flower in the crannied wall’ :

“If I knew  
Only the herbs and simples of the wood,  
...                      ...                      ...  
O, that were much, and I could be a part  
Of the round day, related to the sun  
And planted world, and full executor  
Of their imperfect functions.”

It especially recalls Wordsworth in the sense of affectionate awe loathing the irreverence of

‘One that would peep and botanise  
Upon his mother’s grave’<sup>1</sup>

in the picture—

“But these young scholars, who invade our hills,  
Bold as the engineer who fells the wood,  
And travelling often in the cut he makes,  
Love not the flower they pluck, and know it not,  
And all their botany is Latin names.”

So, over again,

‘Our meddling intellect  
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things :  
We murder to dissect.’<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A Poet's Epitaph*

<sup>2</sup> *The Tables Turned*

How our gross, gilded materialisms have stripped the world of its wonder and shorn humanity of its holiness and how all this deadly debasement has reacted upon our own heads and hearts to our infinite detriment irretrievable save by the recovered perception of the complex of appearances as in reality a succession of modes, moments and manifestations of one only Existence and that, a spiritual Existence—this is roundly expressed by way of contrast to the old paganism ‘suckled in a creed outworn.’

“ The old men studied magic in the flowers,  
And human fortunes in astronomy,  
And an omnipotence in chemistry,  
Preferring things to names, for these were men,  
Were unitarians of the united world,  
And, wheresoever their clear eyebeams fell,  
They caught the footsteps of the SAME. Our eyes  
Are armed, but we are strangers to the stars,  
And strangers to the mystic beast and bird,  
And strangers to the plant and to the mine.”

The rest of the diatribe reads like a close commentary on Wordsworth's

‘ Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon !’

Why it is that

‘ for everything; we are out of tune;  
It moves us not,’

is brought home in the succeeding stricture upon the deplorable decadence of those dispositions of 'admiration, hope and love' which alone could make realisable, with all beatitude, the intrinsically spiritual character of the universe of Man and Nature. "The injured elements," we are warned,

"haughtily return us stare for stare.  
For we invade them impiously for gain;  
We devastate them unreligiously,  
And coldly ask their pottage, not their love.  
Therefore they shove us from them, yield to us  
Only what to our griping toil is due;  
But the sweet affluence of love and song,  
The rich results of the divine consents  
Of man and earth, of world beloved and lover,  
The nectar and ambrosia, are withheld,  
And in the midst of spoils and slaves we thieves  
And pirates of the universe, shut out  
Daily to a more thin and outward rind,  
Turn pale and starve."

Consequently, in the light of this practical and vital philosophy of life and as elsewhere observed in the lines on Illusions, "the waves of mutation"—"accursed, adored"—in the world without and in the world within, where "no anchorage is," readily explain themselves as relative incidents in the eternal self-evolution of the Absolute. After all,

"out of endeavour  
To change and to flow,  
The gas becomes solid,

And phantoms and nothings  
 Return to be things,  
 And endless imbroglia  
 Is law and the world."

A truth this, knitting science and philosophy together, to the recognition of which, we are assured, belongs all "power" and "endurance" in the face of the ever-besetting vicissitudes of chance and change. And the deep interpretation here virtually tallies with that in 'the inscriptive legend' upon the 'private monument' of the two opponents, 'flaming Jacobite' and 'sullen Hanoverian,' harmonised by solitude in the story of *The Excursion* :

'Time flies; it is his melancholy task,  
 To bring, and bear away, delusive hopes,  
 And reproduce the troubles he destroys.  
 But, while his blindness thus is occupied,  
 Discerning Mortal! do thou serve the will  
 Of Time's eternal Master, and that peace  
 Which the world wants shall be for thee confirmed!'

### B—Moral

In Emerson's metaphysical conception, the self runs coalesced with the not-self in the current of one, infinite life pulsating through all—through

"Sea, earth, air, sound, silence,  
 Plant, quadruped, bird,  
 By one music enchanted,  
 One deity stirred." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Sphinx*

All the same, the moral selfhood of the human soul stands out, undissolved, with its growing, inalienable capacity for the perception and pursuit of ethical distinctions. If the mists of pure reason carry Emerson perilously near to the shoals of a colourless monism and a crippling pantheism, of which it is remarkable how there is much less in the poems than in the prose writings, the compass of practical reason avails unfailingly to point him away to the high seas of an independent will and an endless effort. Thus, concurrent with, and even in reaction against, or, rather, as an offshoot from, the abstract monism of the philosophical idealist, we have also the concrete individualism of the moral idealist. On one side is the mystic fact that

“ upper life the slender rill  
Of human sense doth overfill.” <sup>1</sup>

On the other is the practical lesson flowing therefrom,

“ So nigh is grandeur to our dust,  
So near is God to man,  
When duty whispers low, *Thou must*,  
The youth replies, *I can* ” <sup>2</sup>

This, then, is the sum and substance of the transcendentalist's whole theory of human nature—the overflowing immanence of the Ideal Divine as the

<sup>1</sup> *Art*

<sup>2</sup> *Voluntaries*



mightiest inspiration to the actual human, and, consequent upon it, the unspeakable dignity of manhood, the categorical imperativeness of conscience, the implicit docility of the will and the illimitable progression of the soul in all the richness of the Concrete Universal.

So, the manifoldness of truth, goodness, love and beauty—a manifoldness arising out of their very fugitiveness and incompressible into any one feat or formula—provides the poet with scope of treatment for their varied aspects in a catena of charming little poems instinct with invigoration.

At the threshold, in *Nemesis* and two other poems bearing the common name, *Fate* (one of which latter is the proem to an essay on *The Conduct of Life*), the age-long contention between Freewill and Necessity is noticed with an apprehension of the complementary character of those half-truths, neither of them competent to annul the other. A stern, inexorable Destiny overrules all “fortunes, mean or great;” so that

“all our struggles and our toils  
Tighter wind the giant coils.”

Nevertheless, the complete prevision on the part of the Infinite behind the clouded gropings of the finite clarifies and perfects the latter more and more under its very limitations, “obeying time.”  
For,

“the foresight that awaits  
Is the same Genius that creates.”

Accordingly, as observed in yet another piece headed *Fate* likewise, there belongs to the perfect type of manhood, apart from, and other than, all external or acquired characteristics, a certain secret, inborn, indefinable charm beyond toil, art and wit, which means and makes success, that being the result of a natural outflowing like

“ the untaught strain  
That sheds beauty on the rose.”

At the same time, as, according to Wordsworth's vision,

‘ trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home,’

the sunset gleams of a prior grandeur shooting into this terrestrial life, so, even here, the soul of man, Emerson holds, is evermore beset by “ happy guides ” with “ shining trails ” and beckoned on by them to the prospective glory of a transcendent destiny. In a poem bearing that name, these are dwelt upon as *Forerunners*, signifying thereby the never-dormant leadings and pleadings of the In-visible Spirit, the Infinite Ideal, which cometh not with observation but

“ At unawares ’tis come and past,”

with this sequel that “ its tuneful voices,”  
overheard,

“ carry in my heart, for days,  
Peace that hallows rudest ways.”

Herein we get at Emerson's consciousness of much of supernal power beyond appraisal in his own soul as in the souls of all truly great men.

Again, this unseen Presence, the hovering 'dæmon' of the ancients—if it smiles with approbation, it also smites with accusation, setting up a painful, perpetual feud between the known right and the overpowering wrong or between the perceived higher and the favoured lower.

Hence the significant lines in **The Park**,

"The yoke of conscience masterful,  
Which galls me everywhere."

Thus, whether dictating to do or warning not to do,

"I cannot shake off the god ;  
On my neck he makes his seat ;  
I look at my face in the glass—  
My eyes his eyeballs meet."

And then, as the extended echo, so to speak, of the Shakespearean maxim, we have it in **Sursum Corda** that to thine own self to be true is more than negatively to preclude thy being false to any man. It is, indeed, not even to ensure Heaven for a far-off future but to enjoy it in the immediate present,

"Here am I, here will I remain  
For ever to myself soothfast ;  
Go thou, sweet Heaven, or at my pleasure stay !'  
Already Heaven with thee its lot has cast,  
For only it can absolutely deal."

Similar is the practical significance of **Suum Cuique**. Rightly, if relentlessly, do things go in this world by the bent of their being. Hence, as between Nature and the self, the unswerving course of external forces is only a lesson in stricter obedience irrespective of the laws, such as they are, of our own internal constitution.

“ Nature shall mind her own affairs ;  
I will attend my proper cares,  
In rain, or sun, or frost.”

This is what lies back of Emerson's habitual pose of equanimity, ‘ the equanimity of a result ’ (as Henry James calls it)—his ‘ power of acceptance ’ by which ‘ he accepted himself, as he accepted others, accepted everything.’<sup>1</sup>

And, again, as between the self and other selves, the rule of **Compensation** in the midst of diversity debars conformity from aiming at uniformity. All cannot (and shall not) obey the same ‘ moods ’ and ‘ tenses.’

“ Why should I keep holiday  
When other men have none ?  
Why but because, when these are gay,  
I sit and mourn alone ?”

Once more,

“ And why, when mirth unseals all tongues,  
Should mine alone be dumb ?  
Ah ! late I spoke to silent throngs,  
And now their hour is come.”

And thus we are led on to the famous distinction inculcated in the *Gita* between *swadharma* and *paradharma*.

Next follows a series of minor ethical pieces in the wake of the aforesaid root-principle of fidelity to the Higher Self and its Merlin-gleam, that is (in the language of *The Excursion*),

‘ entire submission to the law  
Of conscience—conscience revered and obeyed  
As God’s most intimate presence in the soul,  
And his most perfect image in the world.’

They connect themselves in substance with the notable discourses on *The Conduct of Life*—some, in fact, are actually prefixed as texts to these latter—and they gracefully characterise and commend the more fundamental elements of what lies summed up in the terms ‘ virtue ’ and ‘ gentlemanliness.’

Such, besides *Merlin’s Wisdom*, which covers the whole chart of life in general with its ‘ considerations by the way ’ (as the prose essay puts it), are : **Character ; Heroism ; Forbearance ; Tact ; Prudence ; Power ; Manners and Behaviour.** These offer so many examples of what is rightly noted by John Morley as ‘ the attention that Emerson paid to the right handling of the outer conditions of a wise and brave life. With him small circumstances are the occasion of great qualities.’

In this connection, it is due to Emerson, as it is well for his students, to bear in mind his central theory that "life is rather a subject of wonder than of didactics."<sup>1</sup> Character—the sum-total of, or, more properly, the vital sap within, thought, feeling and action—is far from being a matter of external rule and compass, seeing that "so much fate, so much irresistible dictation from temptation and unknown inspiration, enters into it." Yet, faithful believer as he is also in universal indebtedness to individual heroes and in the unfailing utility of intelligent hero-worship, he points out, too, how "vigour is contagious, and whatever makes us either think or feel strongly, adds to our power and enlarges our field of action." It is thus from the wholesome standpoint (in his own words) of "rather description, or if you please, celebration, than available rules" that he advances these stimulating reflections on the regulation of what makes such a notable blend of the fixed and the fluid, the fugitive and the flexible.

'The perfect life' (to adopt Channing's well-chosen phrase) is, we gather, the trustful life, the sun of whose hope knows no setting, the star of whose faith outshines all galaxies and the moon of whose "sufferance sublime" matches "the taciturnity of time."<sup>2</sup> It is the strenuous life that

<sup>1</sup> *The Conduct of Life—VII : Considerations by the Way*

<sup>2</sup> *Character*

scorns delights and lives laborious days, "not fed on sweets;" for it is only too true of the hero that "Daily his own heart he eats."<sup>1</sup> It is, as evidenced in the tribute paid to J. Elliot Cabot, a noble friend and the later literary executor and authorised historian, the forbearing life that names all the birds without a gun, loves the wood-rose and leaves it on its stalk, eats bread and pulse at rich men's tables, faces danger with a heart of trust, unarmed, and refrains from speech, "nobility more nobly to repay."<sup>2</sup> It is the prudent life that studies tact and address as "the art of all arts"<sup>3</sup> and despises not

"the love of parts,  
And the articles of arts;"<sup>4</sup>

since

"Grandeur of the perfect sphere  
Thanks the atoms that cohere."<sup>5</sup>

It is the polished life that values manners as morality in small matters and brings "the Age of Gold again" by "words more sweet than rain;"<sup>6</sup> because

"The music that can deepest reach,  
And cure all ill, is cordial speech."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Heroism*

<sup>2</sup> *Forbearance*

<sup>3</sup> *Tact*

<sup>4</sup> *Prudence*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *Character*

<sup>7</sup> *Merlin's Wisdom*

Above all, it is the self-sacrificing life that is moved by love to spare its "little to him who has less;" as

"Only the light-armed climb the hill.  
The richest of all lords is Use."<sup>1</sup>

And then, the life so lived, with a tongue "framed to music," a "hand armed with skill" and a "heart the throne of will,"<sup>2</sup> is bound to be, as nought else can be, a power compelling sweet reverence from those "too weak to win, too fond to shun"<sup>3</sup> whose hearts dance within them and whose very solitude is beset with the hero's enchanting countenance transfigured into "the mould of beauty."<sup>4</sup>

The moral and spiritual qualities thus commended are, perhaps not inaptly, condensed into the Leyden Jar of the one word, 'wisdom'—meaning thereby the practical good sense of the heart illumined by the 'kindly light' within and contrasting therewith the shallow unwisdom of the fool who hath said in his heart, 'There is no God.' That, presumably, is what Emerson typifies in the poem entitled *Guy* after one of his "representative men," suggested (may it be?) by the hero of a famous English legend, Sir Guy, Earl of Warwick. Whatever the exact source of the prototype, *Guy* in the poem is "Guy the wise," under the benign

<sup>1</sup> *Merlin's Wisdom*

<sup>2</sup> *Power*

<sup>3</sup> *Manners; Behaviour*

<sup>4</sup> *Powe*



lead of " his Genius discreet." He ever preserves the true philosopher's, that is, the firm believer's temper : for, truly to know is firmly to believe. And thus,

" mixed of middle clay,  
 Attempered to the night and day,"

his spirit, with its *nairdwandwyam* (as characterised in the *Gita*), maintains its neutral equilibrium under all conditions, even like the spherical body in all positions. In effect, he finds, and is delighted to find, that ' All things work together for good to them that trust in God ' and that, accordingly, in his own case " Fortune " becomes " his guard and lover." He discerns,

" with awe,  
 His own symmetry with law "

even " in strange junctures." And " his wise affairs " are so sped that he catches " Nature in his snares." In short, as the common saying runs, all is grist that comes to his mill. So, in the opalescent colours of many a picturesque, if homely, image, we are led to witness " the virtue of his lucky hand," hap what hap. Referring to the secret of this " talisman " of the higher wisdom, Garnett recounts how the experience of his own life appeared to justify and illustrate to Emerson his cherished creed that ' a man needed but to keep himself open to the Divine influence to have his life happily moulded for him.' For, as

the critic goes on to add, ' the Divine blessing, indeed, rarely took in his case the form of money, but intellectual events came as they were wanted, and... everything happened at the right moment for the furtherance of the inner soul and the external end.'

Nor can it be otherwise in a scheme of things deep-laid and broad-based on an eternal principle of righteousness. For, according to Emerson, as well as to Carlyle, his prophet-peer, the heart of the universe is, forsooth, sound at the core, despite all apparent morbidities and even appalling miscarriages. Thus, the inviolability and inevitableness of justice is sung with grace in *Astraea*, a poem named after the last among the divinities to quit the earth at the end of the Golden Age in classic legend.

" For there's no sequestered grot,  
Lone mountain tarn, or isle forgot,  
But Justice, journeying in the sphere,  
Daily stoops to harbour there."

Also, its true inwardness ensures its independence of outward estate.

" There is no king nor sovereign state  
That can fix a hero's rate."

The true judgment-seat stands within. The heart is its own centre, in itself making its own heaven and its own hell. And each man—

'In his dividual being, self-reviewed,  
Self-catechised, self-punished,'<sup>1</sup>

—is his own herald who must write his own rank and quarter his own coat and inscribe 'slave' or 'master' on his breast in his own hand and sentence himself in his own words, his own "thought the penal worm" with its stinging torments—as Tennyson has it,

'A silent court of justice in his breast,  
Himself the judge and jury, and himself  
The prisoner at the bar, ever condemn'd.'<sup>2</sup>

Nay, under "the balance-beam of Fate,"<sup>3</sup> even individual reparations as well as retributions are reassured in the second of the two refreshing stanzas prefixed to the *Essay on Compensation*.

"Fear not, then, thou child infirm,  
There's no god dare wrong a worm;  
Laurel crowns cleave to deserts,  
And power to him who power exerts.  
Hast not thy share? On winged feet,  
Lo! it rushes thee to meet;  
And all that Nature made thy own,  
Floating in air or pent in stone,  
Will rive the hills and swim the sea,  
And like thy shadow, follow thee."

Furthermore, Carlyle's confirmed conviction that '*Bad* is by its nature negative, and can do *nothing*'<sup>4</sup> and that it is, in fact, so much inverted

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth : *The Excursion*

<sup>2</sup> *Sea-Dreams*

<sup>3</sup> *Uriel*

<sup>4</sup> *Essay on Johnson*

good or, as the evolutionists would say, good in the making; and Wordsworth's severe acceptance of

‘ Nature’s law  
That none, the meanest of created things,  
should exist  
Divorced from good—a spirit and pulse of  
good;’<sup>1</sup>

and Tennyson's ‘larger hope’ that

‘ somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill;’<sup>2</sup>

and Browning's faith triumphant that

‘ What was good shall be good, with, for  
evil so much good more;’<sup>3</sup>

—these diverse notes blend together, amidst a vivid setting of dramatic imagery, in a poem of high-soaring imagination named after Milton's ‘sharpest-sighted spirit of all in heaven.’ The result is the ringing utterance of **Uriel**, potent enough to make the powers of darkness shake and shudder, flush and frown, through very confusion.

“ Line in nature is not found;  
Unit and universe are round;  
In vain produced, all rays return;  
Evil will bless, and ice will burn.”

<sup>1</sup> *The Old Cumberland Beggar*

<sup>2</sup> *In Memorium*

<sup>3</sup> *Abt Vogler*

Little wonder that this

“sentiment divine  
Against the being of a line,”

this belief in “the fire-seed” sleeping “in ashes,” in “the good of evil born,” proves to be, evermore and everywhere, a rock of offence, a source of consternation, to all division-dealers and dalliance-mongers—“stern old war-gods” and “seraphs... from myrtle beds.”

Nevertheless, the moral optimism of this, his favourite philosophy of the circle, does not, in the least, betray our sturdy scion of the old Puritan stock into anything like an attitude of indifference or antinomianism. Dr. Garnett’s antithesis must not be overlooked when he observes, ‘Emerson never said that all existing things were the best, but that they were for the best. He insists that all things gravitate towards the good, and that this progression is infinite.’ Although, in the main, and unlike Carlyle, that veritable John the Baptist of the evil days we have fallen upon, he commends virtue more than he condemns vice, yet he is not without his own direct denunciations and rigid renunciations. Witness, for instance, the gentle but firm reproof of avarice and worldliness in the tranquilly affecting *Earth-Song* under a mystic oriental title in **Hamatreya** and of churlishness and cynicism in the pointed lines, **To J. W.**, as also the serene withdrawal from the

vanity fair of human wishes in the elevating verses in **Good-Bye**—the last-named being the poet's own farewell to fame as he hies him to the country.

"Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boys  
Earth-proud, proud of the earth which is not theirs;  
Who steer the plough, but cannot steer their feet  
Clear of the grave.

...            ...            ...  
They called me theirs,  
Who so controlled me;  
Yet every one  
Wished to stay, and is gone.  
How am I theirs,  
If they cannot hold me,  
But I hold them?"<sup>1</sup>

Again,

"Life is too short to waste  
In critic peep or cynic bark,  
Quarrel or reprimand:  
'Twill soon be dark;  
Up! mind thine own aim, and  
God speed the mark!"<sup>2</sup>

Lastly,

"GOOD-BYE, proud world! I'm going home:  
Thou art not my friend, and I'm not thine.  
Long through thy weary crowds I roam;  
A river-ark on the ocean brine,  
Long I've been tossed like the driven foam;

<sup>1</sup> *Hamatreya*

<sup>2</sup> *To J. W.*

But now, proud world ! I'm going home.  
 Good-bye to Flattery's fawning face ;  
 To Grandeur with his wise grimace ;  
 To upstart Wealth's averted eye ;  
 To supple Office, low and high ;  
 To crowded halls, to court and street ;  
 To frozen hearts and hasting feet ;  
 To those who go, and those who come ;  
 Good-bye, proud world ! I'm going home."<sup>1</sup>

How natural this retirement into the "sylvan home" of congenial simplicity on the part of him of whom Garnett attests that even "When in his youth, he played hide-and-seek with the world in the whortle-berry bushes. !

" A spot that is sacred to thought and God,

... ..

When man in the bush with God may meet"

—such is the greeting to "my own hearth-stone."

In consonance with the refined frame of mind described above, which knows how man wants but little here below nor wants that little long and which, therefore, studies a detachment from the sordid and the vulgar surpassed only by its devotion to the sublime and the beautiful, three practical lessons of life follow, touched upon by the poet in a strain of self-monition.

Firstly, there is the duty of cheerful contentment with, even of cordial respect for, the modest

<sup>1</sup> *Good-Bye*

measure of one's endowment and, in view of the one thing needful, freedom from the ambition of overshooting the mark. For, Nature is no maniac scattering dust—no lunatic making a lawless, dead-level lavishment of parts and powers—here below. Rather, as

“ all sorts of things and weather  
Must be taken in together,  
To make up a year  
And a sphere, ”

so

“ Talents differ ; all is well and wisely put.”

Hence the round reply of the squirrel to the mountain in the short, significant **Fable** (just quoted from) about their mutual quarrel :

“ If I'm not so large as you,  
You are not so small as I,  
And not half so spry.  
...                      ...                      ...  
If I cannot carry forests on my back,  
Neither can you crack a nut.”

The ennobling moral of this story, emphasised earlier by Cowper in *The Lily and the Rose*, may be fitly set to the key of the following couplet from another piece<sup>1</sup> to be presently reviewed :—

“ There is no great and no small  
To the Soul that maketh all.”

<sup>1</sup> *History*



It will be found, too, to be in tune with the leading ideas, respectively, of *The Ancient Mariner* and *Pippa Passes*—to wit, the virtue of cherishing all beings with equal love and of appraising all labour as of equal worth.

‘He prayeth best who loveth best  
All things both great and small ;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all ;’

and

‘ All service ranks the same with God—  
With God, whose puppets, best or worst,  
Are we : there is no last nor first.’

Hence, again, in the verses under the title, **Merops**, suggestive of the disastrous presumption of Phæthon (Merops’s son),<sup>1</sup> who, heedless of his earthly origin, presumed to conduct the chariot of the Sun and nearly succeeded in setting our globe on fire, we witness only the grateful acceptance of the gift of “a single speech” saddled with the limitation of “a thousand silences,” considering how

“ Space grants beyond his fated road  
No inch to the god of day.”

Secondly, as enforced in the beautiful poem on **Holidays**, there is the obligation of arduous work as “man and artist”—work which must succeed,

<sup>1</sup> A nobody, a *terra filius*, who thinks himself somebody (*Brewer*)

as it alone can warrant, all vacation and relaxation. Witness, for instance, Nature's parables of the "russet acorn," "children's toy" before and "anchored in the ground" now ; and "the rose-lipped maiden," once "play-fellow of young and old," now

" Disappeared in blessed wife ;  
 Servant to a wooden cradle,"  
 Living in a baby's life."

And thirdly, there is the absolute necessity of quiet concentration upon the living present with its allotment of the chalice of Fate—"nor less, nor more"—in the spirit of 'Sufficient unto the day is the enjoyment and endeavour thereof,' inculcated in the lines on **The Day's Ration**.

" Why need I volumes, if one word suffice ?  
 Why need I galleries, when a pupil's draught  
 After the master's sketch fills and o'erfills  
 My apprehension ? why seek Italy  
 Who cannot circumnavigate the sea  
 Of thoughts and things at home, but still adjourn  
 The nearest matters for a thousand days ?"

And so, as the poet of *The Excursion* has it,

' A light of duty shines on every day  
 For all.'

Further still, as the poem on **Days**, Emerson's own favourite among the shorter lyrics, reminds us, it ultimately depends on man and his own will

what use he makes of, and what good he derives from, those

“ Damsels of Time, the hypocritic Days,  
Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,  
And marching single in an endless file.”

For, whilst they

“ Bring diadems and fagots in their hands,  
To each they offer gifts after his will,  
Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all.”

Thus, in W. J. Long's judgment, the lesson of the value of time is illuminated with celestial light in this poem, whereas earth's candle is brought to that very lesson in the *Essay on Works and Days*—‘ an interesting example of Emerson's use of prose and verse to reflect the same idea’ as also of ‘ the essential difference between prose and poetry.’

Particular principles apart, enough has been already said to show that such is Emerson's high sense of “ the sovereignty of ethics,” of the “ self-sufficingness ” and “ centrality ”<sup>1</sup> of character, as to assign to Virtue the supreme overlordship in relation to all Art and Life. This is how he declares himself on the proper amenities of Art in the poem, *Loss and Gain* :

“ The bard must be with good intent  
No more his, but hers ;  
Must throw away his pen and paint,  
Kneel with worshippers.”

<sup>1</sup> *Essay on Character*

Again, a single sentence from a representative prose-oration, *The American Scholar*, will suffice to define the objective of Life itself as conceived by Emerson. "The main enterprise of the world for splendour, for extent, is," he lays down, "the upbuilding of a man." So that, Nature and all the Muses of true Art and Culture conspire to the one and only end of the art of right living in God's Kingdom of Righteousness.

Moreover, it is added that all species of human excellence, whether of goodness or of greatness—for, these resolve ultimately into one—not only claim an absolute homage but offer a universal heritage. Unto the children of men of all zones and generations it is an inalienable right that belongs, concerning all the inspirations of **History** without exception.

"There is no great and no small  
To the Soul that maketh all :  
And where it cometh, all things are ;  
And it cometh everywhere."

Close upon this simple yet sublime stanza, which reaches down to the very base of Emerson's central doctrine—'the conductor of the Emerson orchestra,' as it may fitly be called after Dr. Garnett's characterisation of the essay on *The Over-Soul*—follows the oft-quoted, superb epigram of illustrative application :

"I am owner of the sphere,  
Of the seven stars and the solar year,

Of Caesar's hand, and Plato's brain,  
Of Lord Christ's heart, and Shakespeare's strain."

Or, as the synthetic genius of our Keshub Chundra would shape it, 'Jesus is my will, Socrates my head, Chaitanya my heart, the Hindu *Rishis* are my soul and the philanthropic Howard my right hand.'

And now, one more poem to conclude our study of the Poems of Moral Life, as a sequel to the aforesaid declaration of the unity of essence and universality of inspiration. This latter, a far-reaching principle which, as already noted, binds the metaphysical and the moral together, also harmonises the solidarity of the race with the separateness of the individual by investing the limited self with unlimited worth both for its own sake and for the sake of "the perfect whole."

"All are needed by each one ;  
Nothing is fair or good alone."

Here, in close reproduction of the verbal vehicle, and in clear extension of the logical import, of Blake's prophecy,

'Everything that lives,  
Lives not alone, nor for itself.'

is condensed the central teaching of the profound poem, **Each and All**. 'The total impression' of it, as granted by W. J. Long, is 'an excellent one' in spite of the laboured verse,

the overweighting thought and the didactic tone. In extension of the scriptural saying that no man liveth unto himself, the position herein pithily outlined carries with it a twofold implication that no individual progress is possible, cut off from outside influence, and that, again, all individual progress, however and wherever attained, must needs radiate to the general mass outside. Three principles follow from this vital fact of interrelation between individual and individual, generation and generation, and, lastly, the individual and the generation. Firstly, the awful responsibility forced upon the individual by the subtle currents of unsuspected power for good or for ill that flow from every well-spring of life.

“ Little thinks, in the field, yon red-cloaked clown,  
Of thee from the hill-top looking down;  
The heifer that lows in the upland farm,  
Far-heard, lows not thine ear to charm;  
The sexton, tolling his bell at noon,  
Deems not that great Napoleon  
Stops his horse, and lists with delight,  
Whilst his files sweep round yon Alpine height;  
Nor knowest thou what argument  
Thy life to thy neighbour's creed has lent.”

Secondly, the extreme indispensability of the social factor in view of that marvellous state of coexistence, correspondence and cooperation between the realities of life and nature, of organism and environment, to which is given the name of truth

and in which alone consists all beauty, so much so that to see things in their beauty is to see things in their truth, that is, in their proper relation one to another. This sense, the poem goes on to hint, is borne in upon us by the contemplation of how entirely bereft of all former, pristine enchantment become (in the inanimate world) "the delicate shells" on the shore with their "sea-born treasures" of pearl fetched home from their setting amidst "the weeds and the foam," "the sun and the sand and the wild uproar;" or (in the lower, sentient creation) the morning bird's heavenly note transferred "in his nest at even" "from the woodlands to the cage;" or, again, (in human society) the lover's "graceful maid" come "to his hermitage" from "amid the virgin train," "the snow-white choir," to be "a gentle wife, but fairy none." And, thirdly, the practical expansion of outlook in every direction, wide as the universe, vast as humanity, at once sweeping away all so-called dividing-lines between elect and damned, sacred and profane, civilised and savage; for, "Each to all is venerable."<sup>1</sup> Hence, in one word, Emerson's belief in the individual, in genius, in biography, in history, in nationalism, in internationalism. And hence, too, what is only the obverse of the above, his disbelief in any one prophet or scripture, church or creed, school or system, culture or civilisation. 'He is almost

<sup>1</sup> *Astraea*

impersonal. He is pure from the taint of sect, clique or party.<sup>1</sup>

“ Christian and Pagan—king and slave,  
Soldier and anchorite,  
Distinctions we esteem so grave  
Were nothing in his sight.”

And why ? Because

“ Lo ! the God’s love blazes higher,  
Till all difference expire.  
What are Moslems? what are Giaours?  
‘ All are Love’s and all are ours.’ ”<sup>2</sup>

### C—Personal

Between the Poems of Individual Life, just finished, and those of Public Life, to follow later, we are now to interpose a small casket of little gems, not dealing with the problems of life in general but dwelling upon a few, particular events in the life-story of the poet himself. The Poems of Personal Life, such as they are, turn rather upon the problems of death and old age as they face him in his own circle and in his own career. As such, they touch the tenderest chord in the heart. His effusions of elegy are clearly among the simplest in structure and sweetest in spirit of their kind. And as ‘ our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought,’ they serve to assign him his proper place among those who ‘ learn in

<sup>1</sup> Garnett

<sup>2</sup> *Song of Seid Nimetullah of Kuhistan* (A dervish-song translated by Emerson)



suffering what they teach in song.' Sweet as love, solemn as loss, sacred as memory, solacing as hope, strengthening as faith, these subjective outpourings of the wounded heart possess an added interest in so far as they disclose the Atlantic depths in the emotional nature of a meditative thinker and teacher habitually reticent about himself.

In that long and placid course of life which was his, 'singularly symmetrical and harmonious,'<sup>1</sup> with little of 'rapidity' or 'complexity' in 'the sequence of events,' 'no mutual hustling or crowding of elements' but only 'the white tint of Emerson's career considered simply in itself,'<sup>2</sup> he was not without his share of tribulation through the stress of circumstance and the strain of affliction. Especially was this the case in the thirties of the century and in the van, as also in the wake, of the resignation of his pastorate in 1832 at the early age of twenty-nine, when he made up his mind that "the day of formal religion is past," as recorded in the only sermon extant in his published works—that on the Lord's Supper. Prior to his fair worldly prospects being thus doomed, he had suffered a heavy calamity in the loss of his young wife of twenty-one, the first choice of his heart—"a bright revelation to me of the best nature of woman." Hence Dr.

<sup>1</sup> Garnett

<sup>2</sup> Henry James

Garnett's remark in the biography, 'The year following his bereavement (1832) was to see Emerson widowed also of his spiritual bride, his church.' His younger brother, Edward Bliss Emerson, a prodigy of talent and power and the rising star of the family, then sank down in health and sought restoration in Porto Rico, where he succumbed in 1834. Charles, another younger brother, who had been an inmate of Waldo's home and his friend and companion for many a year, was already subject to a disease which brought about his end later in 1836. A few more years, and the loss, in 1842, of his own first-born son—according to a friend of the house, 'a domesticated sunbeam'—of five summers came as an unspeakable sorrow to Emerson, who always gave the utmost attention to the training of his children and of whom Garnett notes that, 'If he was more exemplary in any one relation of life than another, it was in the father's.'

Such and so dark was the cluster of clouds under the shadow of which, as related by him in a common **Dirge**, he ever afterwards wandered up and down on Concord Plain by the winding Concord Stream about his home, "beset by pensive hosts."

" But they are gone,—the holy ones  
Who trod with me this lovely vale;  
The strong, star-bright companions  
Are silent, low and pale.

“ My good, my noble, in their prime,  
Who made this world the feast it was,  
Who learned with me the lore of time,  
Who loved this dwelling-place ! ”

Even the soft, silken leaves of the flowers in “ the lovely vale,” once the favourite sport of the loved and lost in every mood, now wounded him

“ with a grief  
Whose balsum never grew.”

So to the pine-warbler’s lay, in itself delicate beyond divination

“ unless God made sharp thine ear  
With sorrow such as mine,”

he would hearken as it rang—

“ Ye cannot unlock your heart,  
The key is gone with them ;  
The silent organ loudest chants  
The master’s requiem.”

And, for him, as for all men of sorrows and acquainted with grief, the insight of sorrow thus hinted at remained a fadeless possession, a dear-bought profit out of pain, down to the end of life.  
For,

‘ there is often found  
In mournful thoughts, and always might be found,  
A power to virtue friendly.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth: *The Excursion*

Feeling every loss, throughout, like a woman but,  
withal, facing it like a man and choosing thus  
'the better part,' which

'needs must make me feel  
More deeply, yet enable me to bear  
More firmly,'<sup>1</sup>

this practical philosopher could bring himself to gather up therefrom not merely consolation or reconciliation but resignation and reassurance. 'Tears flow from my eyes—let them flow round your feet in worship.'<sup>2</sup> Such evermore is the cry of Faith amid the mutual clasp of Love and Grief 'lest both be drown'd.'<sup>3</sup> It was thus verily the pentecost of calamity that was showered forth, particularly in the *Threnody* on the passing of Emerson's eldest. One would have to roam far afield for a more living illustration of the noble lines of Aubrey De Vere, worth engraving in characters of gold:

"Count each affliction, whether light or grave,  
God's messenger sent down to thee; do thou  
With courtesy receive him; rise and bow;  
And, ere his shadow pass thy threshold, crave  
Permission first his heavenly feet to lave;  
Then lay before him all thou hast; allow  
No cloud of passion to usurp thy brow,  
Or mar thy hospitality; no wave

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth: *The Prelude*

<sup>2</sup> Rabindranath: *Brossing*

<sup>3</sup> Tennyson: *In Memoriam*

Of mortal tumult to obliterate  
 The soul's marmoreal calmness ; Grief should be,  
 Like joy, majestic, equable, sedate ;  
 Confirming, cleansing, raising, making free ;  
 Strong to consume small troubles ; to commend  
 Great thoughts, grave thoughts, thoughts lasting  
 to the end."

Before diving into the great and grave and lasting thoughts of the *Threnody*, a passing notice becomes due to the earlier and less penetrative *In Memoriam* verses on Edward Bliss, the brother—verses added as a pendant to the latter's *Last Farewell* of 1832. As the departing brother in his voyage

' From health and home away,  
 Far away, far away,'

has bidden pathetic adieus to Boston's ' lofty spires ' and his ' domestic fires,' to his ' mother fond ' and his ' brothers true'—' my betters, yet my peers '—and breathed sighing vows that his ' heart shall beat not when ' he pants no more for New England, so the deploring brother, after the loss, bemoans " the brief but blazing star " of one to whom " all, all was given, and only health denied." The reflections upon the historic battle-field beside the river-bank with its oak-boughs rooted in the blood of martial heroes turn aptly upon the heroic and the more than heroic in one " born for noblest life," " a living champion of the right."

“ who never wronged  
The poorest that drew breath.”

Thus the vivid picture of the “ soldier born,” “ fronting foes of God and man,” happily recalls the Happy Warrior of Wordsworth commingling into one the two beloved objects of common lament upon a dark day, personal in his brother, John, and national in the greatest of English admirals, who did his duty as England expects every man to do. Again, in point of the unfulfilled power and promise of head and heart on both the softer and sterner sides, it raises up a brilliant replica of the same fateful year in Arthur Henry Hallam. Well may the two portraits, much to our ennoblement, hang side by side in the gallery of pet preferences. Then, how near the one is to the other will soon become manifest, not alone in the lineaments drawn, but even in the colours employed—that is, if it may be permitted at all to institute a comparison between the compact and the elaborate, between a sudden outburst and a seventeen-years’ ‘ interest of tears.’

First, of course, Tennyson, matchless in every way :

‘ Heart-affluence in discursive talk  
From household fountains never dry ;  
The critic clearness of an eye,  
That saw through all the Muses’ walk ;

‘ Seraphic intellect and force  
To seize and throw the doubts of man ;

Impassion'd logic which outran  
The hearer in its fiery course.'

Next, Emerson :

" Of the rich inherent worth,  
Of the grace that on him shone,  
Of eloquent lips, of joyful wit."

Again, Tennyson :

' High nature amorous of the good  
But touch'd with no ascetic gloom;  
And passion pure in snowy bloom  
Thro' all the years of April blood.'

And Emerson :

" All inborn power that could  
Consist with homage to the good  
Flamed from his martial eye."

Once more, Tennyson :

' Nor ever narrowness or spite,  
Or villain fancy fleeting by,  
Drew in the expression of an eye  
Where God and Nature met in light;  
  
' And thus he bore without abuse  
The grand old name of gentleman.'

And Emerson :

" And never poor beseeching glance  
Shamed that sculptured countenance.

He could not frame a word unfit,  
An act unworthy to be done ;  
Honour prompted every glance,  
Honour came and sat beside him,  
In lowly cot or painful road."

Further on, Tennyson :

' Thy converse drew us with delight,  
The men of rathe and ripe years:  
The feeble soul, a haunt of fears,  
Forgot his weakness in thy sight.  
  
' On thee the loyal-hearted hung,  
The proud was half disarm'd of pride,  
Nor cared the serpent at thy side  
To flicker with doubtful tongue.'

And Emerson :

" His from youth the leader's look  
Gave the law which others took."

Once again, Tennyson :

' (He) Best seem'd the thing he was, and join'd  
Each office of the social hour  
To noble manners, as the flower  
And native growth of noble mind.'

And Emerson :

" Born for success he seemed,  
With grace to win, with heart to hold,  
With shining gifts that took all eyes."

Finally, Tennyson :

' I doubt not what thou wouldst have been :



' A life in civic action warm,  
     A soul on highest mission sent,  
     A potent voice in Parliament,  
 A pillar steadfast in the storm,  
  
 ' Should licensed boldness gather force,  
     Becoming, when the time has birth.  
     A lever to uplift the earth  
 And roll it in another course.'

And Emerson :

" With budding power in college-halls,  
 As pledged in coming days to forge  
 Weapons to guard the State, or scourge  
 Tyrants despite their guards or walls."

In fine, throughout the poem with its truly natural alternations of address and account in liquid monosyllables, one can scarcely forbear the gladsome acclamation that here is something Tennyson might not disown for its faith, feeling and flavour. Especially so, as one lights upon verses like

" I see him ... ..  
 ... ..  
 Nor bate one jot of heart or hope,  
 And, least of all, the loyal tie  
 Which holds to home 'neath every sky,  
 The joy and pride the pilgrim feels  
 In hearts which round the hearth at home  
 Keep pulse for pulse with those who roam,"

or, again, upon the succeeding stave on

" What generous beliefs console  
 The brave whom Fate denies the goal."

On the one hand, we sympathise with Tennyson's  
'home-bred fancies,' to which

'sweeter seems  
To rest beneath the clover sod,'

so that

' 'Tis well; 'tis something ; we may stand  
Where he in English earth is laid.'

On the other, we admire Emerson's virile faith to which the latitude and longitude of the interment of "rich dust" signifies nothing after the spirit's home-going into the bosom of its Maker.

"What matters how, or from what ground,  
The freed soul its Creator found?"

Through a similar passage of life when 'a deep distress hath humanised my Soul,'<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth is fortified by the 'higher trust'<sup>2</sup> that 'Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.'<sup>3</sup> And now, Emerson, as he bemoans "the brave whom Fate denies the goal," is consoled by the "generous belief" which

"If others reach it, is content;  
To Heaven's high will his will is bent,  
Firm on his heart relied,  
What lot soe'er betide,  
Work of his hand

<sup>1</sup> *Elegiac Stanzas*

<sup>2</sup> *Elegiac Verses*

<sup>3</sup> *Elegiac Stanzas*

He nor repents nor grieves,  
 Pleads for itself the fact,  
 As unrepenting Nature leaves  
 Her every act."

Passing on from the lament over the brother to that over the son in the *Threnody*, one of the most perfect among the longer poems, we notice, first, how the one begins, as the other ends, with the contemplation of Nature, which made for directly opposite influences in the two instances. If it soothed grief and sustained faith in the earlier calamity, it intensified the loss and made the void more aching in the later. As regards the beloved brother who perished at Porto Rico,

"the endless smile  
 Of Nature in thy Spanish isle  
 Hints never loss or cruel break  
 And sacrifice for love's dear sake."

But in respect of the darling son who yielded up his breath at home and before the father's eyes, the South-wind only too vividly proves its powerlessness to restore the dead, while it

"brings Life, sunshine, and desire,  
 And on every mount and meadow  
 Breathes aromatic fire."

It

"Finds young pines and budding birches;  
 But finds not the budding man."

Thus, the first sense—and a keen, appalling sense—that fills the "empty house," circled with

trees at work marvellously repairing their boughs,  
is this, that

“ Nature, who lost, cannot remake him;  
Fate let him fall, Fate can't retake him;  
Nature, Fate, men, him seek in vain.”

Then, the sense of loss beyond restoration vents  
itself in wistful cadences recalling the all too short-  
lived happiness of “ each day's festival ” in every  
movement and utterance of that tenderest object  
of loss. The “ household cheer ” of eloquent  
babbling which always arrested “ fairest dames  
and bearded men; ” the “ cordial game ” with  
“ the wicker waggon-frame; ”

“ the beautiful parade,  
Stately marching in cap and coat  
To some tune by fairies played, ”

while the father's bosom glowed with love and  
pride joyfully to look out from the window upon  
the morning school march amidst a “ lovely  
caravan; ” “ the painted sled; ”

“ The kennel by the corded wood;  
The gathered sticks to stanch the wall  
Of the snow-tower; ”

the “ daily haunts ” of

“ The poultry-yard, the shed, the barn,—  
And every inch of garden ground ”

up to

“ the brook  
Whereinto he loved to look; ”

“ The ominous hole he dug in the sand,  
And childhood’s castles built or planned ;”

—these all are touched with delicate pencil-strokes in a realistic picture of exquisite pathos traced by memory with the aid of fancy.

Next, as to the rathe primrose too early nipped in the bud—and there seems to be something in the old Shakespearean sentiment in *Cymbeline*, “ Whom the gods love die young ”—its rich dower in form and faculty alike is indicated in such effusive epithets as “ the wondrous child,” “ the hyacinthine boy,”

“ the most beautiful and sweet  
Of human youth,”

“ Nature’s sweet marvel undefiled,”

“ The blossom of the earth,  
Which all her harvests were not worth,”

and, crowning all, “ child of paradise.” Throughout, no mere parental or poetic extravagance is here, be it added ; but a common conviction, on all hands, of “ His early hope, his liberal mien ”—a circumstance which naturally renders the affliction by far heavier and, at the same time, exemplarily lends the mourner a thrice-noble trait of detachment even in the throes of the writhing agony.

“ Not mine,—I never called thee mine,  
But Nature’s heir,—it I repine,  
And seeing rashly torn and moved  
Not what I made, but what I loved.

Grow early old with grief that thou  
Must to the wastes of Nature go,—  
’Tis because a general hope  
Was quenched, and all must doubt  
and grope.”

How sorely our sorrow-stricken philosopher  
himself must have doubted and groped under the  
unbearable burden of his cross before he realised  
in himself the beatitude of the comfort which  
evermore waits upon them that mourn ! Of that we  
have some glimpse in the heavy-laden lines,

“ The eager fate which carried thee  
Took the largest part of me :  
For this losing is true dying,  
This is lordly man’s down-lying,  
This his slow but sure reclining,  
Star by star his world resigning.”

So, he breaks out into heart-piercing plaints of  
dismay and distress over Nature’s own failure :

“ O loss of larger in the less ! ”  
“ O truth’s and nature’s costly lie !  
O trusted broken prophecy !  
O richest fortune sourly crossed !  
Born for the future, to the future lost ! ”

In quite an Eastern, almost feminine vein, the  
fond questioning follows,

“ Was there no star that could be sent,  
No watcher in the firmament,  
No angel from the countless host

That loiters round the crystal coast,  
Could stoop to heal that only child?"

The answer comes, also quite Eastern and feminine : the world

" was not ripe ye to sustain  
A genius of so fine ta strain."

"His beauty once their beauty tried,"—to wit,  
that of the sun and moon.

" They could not feed him and he died,  
And wandered backward as in scorn,  
To wait an aeon to be born."

Here we enter into the spirit and meaning of the mourner, who himself wrote, " The innocent and beautiful should not be sourly and gloomily lamented, but with music and fragrant thoughts and sportive recollections."

Yet this playful temper of almost fantastic querulity, however natural to an excess of emotion, can scarcely sustain itself or the sorrowing soul. Hence, " the deep Heart," significantly so called, rings forth its deepest ministrations, with which the rest of the elegy is taken up, making altogether one of the grandest passages of human consolation. Notice, it is " the deep Heart "—" the Heart within the heart " <sup>1</sup> (as in Wordsworth), at once one with the Divine Comforter—that ministers, as no dogma or dialectic can do, in the

<sup>1</sup> *The Excursion.*

hour of despair when the soul has gone down into the Dark Valley. Heart hearkening unto heart, deep answering unto deep—this is the only satisfying solution of the awful, inscrutable riddle in the ultimate of experience. Out of the mist of words and phrases and away from the fog of tradition and hearsay, the soul has to be drawn into direct communion (through encounter) with those verities and to feel upon itself the breath of those sublimities that lie hidden in the unfathomable depths. And then it becomes truly victorious through suffering. The cleansing fire passes over it. And all the strings turn responsive to the finger of God, as He beats His music out through the chosen lyre. So, “the deep Heart” admonishes the mourner thus in terms of the widest application :

“ But thou, my votary, weepest thou?  
I gave thee sight—where is it now ?  
I taught thy heart beyond the reach  
Of ritual, bible, or of speech ;  
Wrote in thy mind’s transparent table,  
As far as the incommunicable;  
Taught thee each private sign to raise,  
Lit by the supersolar blaze.  
Past utterance, and past belief,  
And past the blasphemy of grief,  
The mysteries of Nature’s heart;  
And though no Muse can these impart,  
Throb thine with Nature’s throbbing breast,  
And all is clear from east to west.”

Not alone every ‘ heart of Rachel, for her children



crying,' but all who, with Emerson, find themselves "too much bereft" in one way or another, must go and do likewise and make their own these ministrations of "the deep Heart" in order to catch the far-off interest of tears.

And here, as against the prevailing proneness to Indianise Emerson out and out, it may be proper to note that on this problem of death, which is only the counterpart to the problem of life, his teaching to himself and to the world is the sweet, sober Nature-philosophy of spiritual refinement and reassurance, nothing like the arid pseudo-vedantic metaphysic of dialectical analysis or the wild pauranic mythus of speculative adventure. Like Yama's revelations in response to Nachiketasa's probings, these ministrations lay bare the *vital* principle of death as it is seen to be not the loss of life but the largess of larger life. And they place the ground and guarantee of this eternal expansiveness of life in the ever-inherent permanence of the One, Infinite Life underneath all finite lives. The two steps to the realisation of this *Yama-yoga* are laid down as, first, the disillusionment (or clearance of all bedimming motes) and, next, the discovery (or manifestation of the truth of things). Accordingly, the start is made with a gentle rebuke to the purblindness that gropes as "with aged eyes, short way before," the materialism that assumes "Beauty vanished from the coast" and the secularism that hands the

spirit over to loneliness albeit hemmed in quite by "worlds of lovers." Once the eye within the eye has been fully opened and, from before it, the masks have fallen "that dizen Nature's carnival," death gently unfolds itself as a necessary and all too benignant incident of life. And even as St. Paul affirmed, 'To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,'<sup>1</sup> the mourner learns to aver of the mourned, 'For me to have him in the flesh was God, to have him translated out of it is gain: withdrawn from the eye after a while—

' And a day less or more  
At sea or ashore,  
We die—does it matter when ?'

(as Tennyson makes Sir Richard Grenville ask)—he is vouchsafed to the heart back again and for ever, clothed in celestial robes. Yea; to have him in the flesh was God: he was very God with me, Immanuel—itsself matter enough for endless thanksgiving! "The deep Heart" imparts as much to Emerson in words of haunting beauty:

' I came to thee as to a friend,  
Dearest,                   ...                   ...  
...                   ...                   ...                   ...  
That thou might'st break thy daily bread  
With prophet, saviour, and head;  
That thou might'st cherish for thine own  
The riches of sweet Mary's Son,  
Boy-Rabbi, Israel's paragon."

<sup>1</sup> *Philippians* I, 21

Here, indeed, in this practical idealism of Universal Immanence, we strike upon the roots of true, essential Vedantism grafted on true, liberal Christian soil, one promising offshoot, though a cramped offshoot, of which we recognise in what is known in our own times as the New Theology. Every babe at every Mary's breast a Jesu, every lad on every Yasoda's lap a Balagopala ! ' Put off thy shoes from off thy feet ; for the ground thou standest on is holy ground.' Oh, if only these levels of consciousness could be uniformly sustained, as by the ancient sages, over the lowlands of daily routine, and were it not, alas, too true of ' the vision splendid ' of Wordsworth's immortal *Ode* that, while ' Heaven lies about us in our infancy !,'

' At length the Man perceives it die away  
And fade into the light of common day,'

how different would be our *samskaras*—home relations, school-cultures, social institutions and all ! Why, as Carlyle reminds us, even the conventional courtesy in the street would prove to be nothing short of an act of literal adoration. "Jove nods to Jove from behind each one of us" is Emerson's way of denoting this divine homage, as *Narayanarpanamasthu* ('I pass it on to Narayana') is our own hallowed way of treating it. Now, like

' Sweet Hesper-Phosphor, double name  
For what is one, the first, the last,'

differently poised and proclaimed at different times, this God-man in universal humanity is the same infinite and finite from different angles. The self-manifestation of the infinite in the finite is, and must be, its self-limitation ; and self-limitation means self-imposed imperfection. But the infinite, however self-limiting, cannot but remain also undivided and transcendent in essence. Thus, on the one hand, " the mystic gulf from God to man " is spanned. And, on the other, the imperfections and inequalities in the human explain themselves, leaving untouched the perfectness and impartiality of the Divine. The self-manifestation of the infinite in the finite or, in customary parlance, the course of creation can never be static, because *per se* it knows no finality or homogeneity at any one stage. Hence Emerson's " deep Heart " presents to him the sharp query,

“ Would rushing life forget her laws,  
Fate's glowing revolution pause ? ”

It further presses home the charge to

“ know my higher gifts unbind  
The zone that girds the incarnate mind.  
When the scanty shores are full  
With thought's perilous, whirling pool;  
When frail Nature can no more,  
Then the Spirit strikes the hour :  
My servant Death, with solving rite,  
Pours finite into infinite.”

Life's goal, then, is not the grave but a boundless Beyond.

' Our destiny, our being's heart and home,  
Is with infinitude, and only there.' <sup>1</sup>

And the whole position redounds to the due glory alike of life and death, each in its proper measure and in the right perspective. Even under present conditions, no original taint or twist inheres either in the fleshly temple or in the indwelling Lord. Nothing is so profane as to call life here profane. It is no snare or delusion at all but a tremendous reality and, withal, a temporal reality—an entrance school and discipline only preparatory to the university of endless 'advancement in learning.' Of life here the life hereafter is to be an ordered continuation and development with no unearned elevation through imputed righteousness. Life here is (shall we say?) despicable only relatively—and, then, properly so—in comparison with the life hereafter. 'Is not the life more than meat and the body more than raiment?' <sup>2</sup> This contrast "the deep Heart" brings out in the words,

"Fair the soul's recess and shrine,  
Magic, built to last a season;  
Masterpiece of love benign.  
Fairer that expansive reason  
Whose omen'tis, and sign."

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth: *The Prelude*

<sup>2</sup> St. Matthew VI, 25

Death being seen, in truth, to be 'not *finis* but the end of volume one,' or, in the matchless phrasing of that singularly gifted savant of the Spirit, Dr. James Martineau, 'but God's method of colonization, the transition from this mother-country of ours to the fairer and newer World of our migration,' to wish that it were not would be even to

"Nail the wild star to its track  
On the half-climbed zodiac."

But no : that cannot be. It is verily

"the genius of the whole  
Ascendant in the private soul"

that beckons the latter. And how can it stay ; why should it tarry ; wherefore need one grudge its going, in face of the "higher gifts" of the Promised Land and "Fate's glowing revolution" itself, which is beyond resistance? Listen once again, adds "the deep Heart," to the Law of Life all over :

"Light is light which radiates,  
Blood is blood which circulates,  
Life is life which generates,  
And many-seeming life is one,—  
Wilt thou transfix and make it none?  
Its onward force too starkly pent  
In figure, bone and lineament?"

So far, enough has been seen to vindicate or, at least, to indicate the Master's assured faith that the pouring of "finite into infinite" at death stands, not for the soul's traceless submergence in

God, but for its deliverance into that boundless realm of pure Spirit where death shall no longer hold sway. By the inmost definition of the concept, the 'self-sundering' of the Infinite Divine into the finite human could never once have been an act of arithmetical subtraction. And, therefore, it could never again admit of additive reabsorption or recoupment. Also, from the consideration of the inherent motive-quality behind that self-sundering—to wit, the bliss of love described in the verse, 'From bliss these beings are born; by bliss, when born, they live; into bliss they enter at their death'—the need of otherness in the object of love for the Eternal Divine must remain an eternal condition, not terminable, as such, with the dissolution of this muddy vesture of decay for each entity. Hence, God being what He is, the *Purusham mahantham*, the distinctness of the *jeevatma* from (not, of course, its independence of) the *Paramatman* through the life everlasting as well as in the present limited life, becomes a necessity alike of thought and experience. And this mystery of unity-in-difference and difference-in-unity is what is cognised, by implication, as *maya* in the Sankarite, and, more explicitly, as *leela* in the Vaishnavite system.

In fact, in the admonition,

"Wilt thou freeze love's tidal flow,  
Whose streams through nature circling go?"

1 *Taitthireeyopanishad* (Max Muller's translation)

Emerson's " deep Heart " goes further than the affirmation of personal immortality for the human self and of eternally-enduring, eternally-enlarging love-relations for it with the Supreme Spirit. On the strength of

" What rainbows teach and sunsets show,  
Verdict which accumulates  
From lengthening scroll of human fates,  
Voice of earth to earth returned,  
Prayers of saints that inly burned,"

he comes distinctly to extend the Law of Love into the certitude of reunion between soul and soul across the bar. As the burden of the lament at first was

" Fate let him fall, Fate can't retake him,"

so the secret of the solace in the end is

" 'Tis not within the force of fate  
The fate-conjoined to separate "

If severance awhile in the flesh is inevitable, restoration for ever in the spirit is no less so. Even as Tennyson rounds it off in two little lyrical snatches, if ' all things must die,' ' nothing will die,' too. ' Destiny itself could not doom him not to die,' thunders Carlyle<sup>1</sup> in his own emphatic way, speaking of Dante. At the same time, the deeper, complementary part of the immutable

<sup>1</sup> *Heroes and Hero-Worship*



verity is also there, that Destiny itself could not keep Dante for ever from the Beatrice of his heart and the God of his Paradiso. Emerson valued life and love in the individual far too highly to remain content with the old Greek faith that in the life to come, there shall be loveliness in place of all lovely things, and love instead of lovers. The conclusion of the *Threnody* places this beyond doubt, as also how little he would have been satisfied with the popular Hindu theory (as taught in a widely-known ascetic verse) <sup>1</sup> of the accidental conjunction all too transient, followed by the equally random disjunction for ever irreversible, of two pieces of driftwood upon the shores of existence. We turn here to the Essay on *Nominalist and Realist* for Emerson's spiritual prevision of the demonstrations of psychical research : "Nothing is dead : men feign themselves dead, and endure mock funerals and mournful obituaries, and there they stand looking out of the window, sound and well, in some new and strange disguise."

It is profoundly significant that, as on the question of Duty from the side of conscience, so on the problem of Immortality from the side of the affections, Emerson does recover himself wholly from the all-resolving tendencies of absolute pantheism to which much of his writing is exposed from the metaphysical side.

<sup>1</sup> *Idamkashitamidamkashitam nadeetheerecha sangamam ;  
samyogascha viyogascha kathamthra-parivedana ?*

And now to the close of " the deep Heart's " ministrations summing up the ' great thoughts, grave thoughts, thoughts lasting to the end ' commended to Emerson by ' God's messenger ' of affliction :

" *What is excellent,  
As God lives, is permanent ;  
Hearts are dust, hearts' loves remain ;  
Heart's love will meet thee again.*  
Revere the Maker ; fetch thine eye  
Up to his style, and manners of the sky.  
'Not of adamant and gold  
Built he heaven stark and cold ;  
No, but a nest of bending reeds,  
Flowering grass, and scented weeds ;  
Or like a traveller's fleeing tent,  
Or bow above the tempest bent ;  
Built of tears and sacred flames,  
And virtue reaching to its aims ;  
Built of furtherance and pursuing,  
Not of spent deeds, but of doing.  
Silent rushes the swift Lord  
Through ruined systems still restored.  
Broadsgiving, bleak, and void to bless,  
Plants with worlds the wilderness ;  
Waters with tears of ancient sorrow  
Apples of Eden ripe tomorrow.  
House and tenant go to ground,  
Lost in God, in Godhead found."

Upon this, comment cannot be; in transport it must expire. All ye who are sore-troubled with the precariousness of the tenure on which we hold our present being, and ye anointed ones

who have buried your loves beyond the reach of sight and sound and sense, come, come unto these ambrosial accents and drink their heavenly nectar in ! Bind and bandage these panacean herbs closest to the heart ; and let their balsam, compounded of the highest, holiest hopes of the human race, permeate all the tissues and sinews of your pain-paralysed beings.

“ What is excellent,  
As God lives, is permanent ;  
Hearts are dust, hearts' loves remain ;  
Heart's love will meet thee again,

...                      ...                      ...  
Lost in God, in Godhead found.”

A veritable ‘ gospel according to ’ the human heart divine and unto the human heart distraught ! Its securest pledge of immortality abides in the very God whose highest human name is Love—the Love that, in Divine spousal, is bestowed alone on individuals or *vyaktis*—

‘ That God who takes away, yet takes not half  
Of what he seems to take ; or gives it back,  
Not to our prayer, but far beyond our prayer ! ’<sup>1</sup>

And its surest condition of immortality consists, not in any unique resurrection of the body after death, but in that very death which itself is the universal, radiant resurrection of the soul from the sealed sepulchre of mouldering flesh, even like that

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth : *The Excursion*

of the winged wonder out of the crawling worm !  
So shall we, with Emerson, quaff the gall and  
bitterness and, likewise, find the elixir in the cup,  
emptying which the eyes flow in tears, the blood  
boils in passion, the heart splits in pain but,  
withal, the smile gleams upon the face and the  
swan-song rises to the lip. So shall we endure  
with Emerson as seeing Him who is invisible.  
And if we cannot write, we can strive to live,  
threnodies vibrant with the breath of ' the life  
elysian.'

By way, so to say, of an epitome of Emerson's  
*Threnody*, a glance may just be taken at the  
memorable verses on *Resignation* composed by  
Longfellow as a like mourner over the early grave  
of a darling daughter.

' Let us be patient ! These severe afflictions  
Not from the ground arise ;  
But oftentimes celestial benedictions  
Assume this dark disguise.

' We see but dimly through the mists and vapours;  
Amid these earthly damps,  
What seem to us but sad, funereal tapers  
May be heaven's distant lamps.

' There is no death ! What seems so is transition.  
This life of mortal breath  
Is but a suburb of the life elysian  
Whose portal we call death.'

The sheet-anchor of both being the same in the  
two elegies, equally free from pastoral fantasies

or the like, the philosopher in Emerson reproves the "blasphemy" of faithless grief, and the lyrist in Longfellow counsels the silent, trustful sanctification—not the suppression—of 'the grief that must have way.'

In *Mary Magdalene*, that grandly affecting spiritual drama which we owe to Maurice Maeterlinck, the Rabindranath, perhaps, of the West in our day, Silanus, the unconverted Roman, disconsolate at the loss of a dearly beloved child, rightly says, 'To console is not to do away with sorrow, but to teach one how to overcome it;' and Longinus, his master, sends him consolation in the words, 'You ought to bring yourself to this frame of mind, that you were more pleased at having had him than grieved that you had him no longer... Of those whom we have loved, much remains to us after death has removed them.....To complain that the friend or the child is dead is to complain that he was ever born.....He who has come into the world must also leave it.' This, it is intended to show, is as far as godless philosophy can reach. But how infinitely further spiritual religion may pierce through the veil, we see in the elegy now studied—a nobly heartening, internal witness to the welcome discoveries of psychical research. Such is the *Threnody*, itself a "silver warble wild" like the departed child's voice as it impressed the wailing father.

Two other sweet carols, *Terminus* and *The Past*,

complete the elevating group of Poems of Personal Life. Written as the years have advanced upon the spirit mellowed with sorrow and suffering, they take, respectively, a bold prospect of the declining faculties of age with the insidious approaches of death and a calm retrospect, in the face of death itself, of the life lived and the task 'finished' beyond any the least reversal.

In *Terminus*, with its suggestive title—itsself suggested, perchance, by the locomotive life of New England—the gentle warning-rap, "in his fatal rounds," of

"The god of bounds,  
Who sets to seas a shore,"

promptly stimulates a gallant girding up, without demur, to,

"fault of novel germs,  
Mature the unfallen fruit "

and, without dread, to encounter dotage and decease. This mood of preparedness is woven with artless art, in a lively succession of snapshot images tender and pathetic, round about the nautical comparison familiar to us through Tennyson's

'Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me !  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea.'

In its breezy, cheery optimism of outlook, the poem chimes in with these notes and, more closely, with the opening strains of *Rabbi Ben Ezra*,

‘ Grow old along with me !  
The best is yet to be,  
The last of life for which the first was made ;’

and with the whole of that other lay (written shortly after Mrs. Browning’s death), *Prospice*, which we owe to Browning, ‘ever a fighter,’ the most intrepid amongst all the subjective rationalist-spirits of England’s Helicon—a coterie from which Shelley stands apart as a subjective emotionalist and Byron further away as a wholly objective rebel. Nor is it easy to forget, in this context, the devout spirit of calm self-examination and self-surrender breathing through the two companion poems—*At Last* and *What the Traveller said at Sunset*—from the pen of Whittier, Emerson’s own compatriot and compeer. The closing lines are not without a message of invigoration even for youth, though tending towards active renunciation :

“ As the bird trims her to the gale.  
I trim myself to the storm of time,  
I man the rudder, reef the sail,  
Obey the voice at eve obeyed at prime :  
‘Lowly faithful, banish fear,  
Right onward drive unarmed ;  
The port, well worth the cruise, is near,  
And every wave is charmed.’ ”

In *The Past*, the survey of the life stretching behind assumes an aspect of serene satisfaction in its having, once for all, formed a part of "eternal Fact" not open to revocation by any means or to readjustment in any manner.

" The debt is paid,  
The verdict said,  
The Furies laid,  
The plague is stayed,  
All fortunes made:  
Turn the key and bolt the door.  
...                      ...                      ...  
All is now secure and fast ;  
Not the gods can shake the Past."

And the old, sweet welcome to the Dark Angel  
is fluted again :

" Sweet is death for evermore."

How naturally, indeed, all this comes from one so filled with the sense of ' spirit ' and of ' fact ' that to him the invisible is the only real ! Generally speaking, it is, no doubt, only too true, as pointed out by John Morley, that ' Of nothing in all the wide range of universal topics does Emerson say so little as of death.' But this, like his wonted silence on the other topic of sin, is even because of his very negation of death as of sin, in a way—a negation to which he gives expression only as it is wrung out of him by events.



## CHAPTER VIII

### POEMS OF PUBLIC LIFE

As the Poems of Individual Life have been grouped under the three minor heads of Metaphysical, Moral and Personal Life, so the present section of the Poems of Public Life may be considered under the three classes, Social, Political and Occasional or Commemorative.

Here the paucity of pieces devoted to the communal concerns of public life during that most eventful epoch becomes noteworthy by the side, for one thing, of the large output of the anti-slavery lyrics of the 'Pennsylvania Freeman,' the abolitionist satires of *The Biglow Papers* of 'the Renaissance Humanist' and the *Drum Taps* and *Democratic Vistas* of 'the Wound-Dresser.' But sufficiently emphatic in tone, few though in number, are Emerson's pronouncements on the wider socio-political problems of those 'spacious days,' certainly not less spacious than the Elizabethan era to which Tennyson applied the epithet. And the serene philosopher's inspiration may be seen to have flowed freely and fruitfully into the diverse currents of contemporary thought and action in the nation. With the emergence and progress of anti-slavery agitation, his excessive individualism received at once a sharp check and

a sound corrective, when he came to realise that "Here is a right social or public function which one man cannot do, which all men must do." However considerable the stress laid by him upon the individual, Emerson did not overlook the claims of society even as the arena of individuality, as the soul's opportunity. No doubt, as observed by Lowell in the *Essay on Thoreau*, Emerson's teaching, in its effect, 'tended much more exclusively than Carlyle's to self-culture and the independent development of the individual man.' Yet it is also equally true, as noted by Hutton in his *Brief Literary Criticisms*, that 'Emerson sympathised ardently with all the greatest practical movements of his own day, while Carlyle held contemptuously aloof.' So far as Emerson is concerned, Lowell himself adds that 'Emerson, reverencing strength, seeking the highest outcome of the individual, has found that society and politics are also main elements in the attainment of the desired end and has drawn steadily manward and worldward;' and, again, 'Though holding himself aloof from all active partnership in movements of reform, he has been the sleeping partner who has supplied a great part of their capital.' And this at a juncture when, as Emerson himself indicated about his own little community of idealists, there was not one among them who had not the prospectus of a new world in his waist-coat pocket. Of this whole attitude the explanation is

met with in a few pithy and pregnant words about Whitman given us in the treatise on *Great Writers of America* (in the Home University Library series). 'No revolution that purposes to better human conditions,' testify its joint-authors, 'is likely to fail of finding its text in him. But with that reform which proposes an immediate end he has little in common ; the truth of life, for him as for Emerson, is strictly, mathematically, in infinites.'

### A—Social

A sort of connecting link between the Poems of Individual and those of Social Life may be found in the glowing tribute to the rooted steadfastness and the romantic edifications of **Friendship**. The germ of this idea was laid in the closing thought of *Merlin's Wisdom* (already considered), namely, "For a friend is life too short." And now, in development of it and by way of warm personal acknowledgment, we are told how the soul, lifted out of itself into a larger life and outlook, finds

" A ruddy drop of manly blood  
The surging sea outweighs.  
The world uncertain comes and goes,  
The lover rooted stays."

Again, as to Love's transfiguration of dreary prose into divine poetry,

" O friend, my bosom said,  
Through thee alone the sky is arched,

Through thee the rose is red ;  
All things through thee take nobler form,  
And look beyond the earth,  
The mill-round of our fate appears  
A sun-path in thy worth."

And so, we are led to apprehend the import of the words in the prose essay headed with this poem : "The essence of friendship is entireness, a total magnanimity and trust...It treats its object as a god, that it may deify both." And so, John Morley is 'satisfied that 'No modern...has given so remarkable a place to Friendship among the sacred necessities of well-endowed character. Neither Plato nor Cicero, least of all Bacon, has risen to so noble and profound a conception.'

One phase of society that comes in for sharp indictment in an apparently light view but through tensely drawn lines is that of the gewgaw artificialities of modern life. **The Romany Girl** is made the 'spokesman' of the impeachment couched in the poignant sarcasm of contrast by means of a well-wrought-out imagery. Conscious of her own flaming beauty—unadorned, adorned the most—behind the coarseness of a poor attire, the gypsy maid astutely turns the tables upon the polished pallor of "Northern girls" with a metallic force of utterance.

"you are Gypsies in a mask  
And I the lady all the while."

Further,

“ you doubt we read the stars on high,  
Nathless we read your fortunes true ;  
The stars may hide in the upper sky,  
But without glass we fathom you.”

And how runs this fortune-reading? First, as to habits of movement—

“ You captives of your air-tight halls,  
Wear out indoors your sickly days,  
But leave us the horizon walls.”

Next, about face and feature—

“ Go, keep your cheek's rose from the rain,  
For teeth and hair with shopmen deal ;  
My swarthy tint is in the grain,  
The rocks and forest know it real.”

Lastly, in regard to whims of love—

“ If, on the heath, below the moon,  
I court and play with paler blood,  
Me false to mine dare whisper none,—  
One sallow horseman knows me good.”

The crowning poetic touches in the piece belong to the stanza,

“ The wild air bloweth in our lungs.  
The keen stars twinkle in our eyes,  
The birds gave us our wily tongues,  
The panther in our dances flies.”

The ' state of nature ' is thus brought nearest to the ideal state of social existence. Well is it observed elsewhere <sup>1</sup> of Nature that

“ Yet doth much her love excel  
To the souls that never fell,  
To swains that live in happiness,  
And do well because they please,  
Who walk in ways that are unfamed,  
And feats achieve before they're named.”

Lines like these Wordsworth might have found applicable to his favourite dalesmen in appraisal of their pure and honest, simple and sturdy, ways. He has a poem of his own on this same subject of *Gipsies*. But, there, it is the other side of the picture that engages him—not quick susceptibility but dead immobility in a race so unmoved by ' change and cheer ' that ' as I left I find them ' and so untouched by the glories of Nature that ' they regard not ' Sun or Vesper or Moon. And thus the piteous, pensive ire of the *spectator ab extra* is aroused against a civilisation culpably incongruous with such abject submergence of ' human Beings.'

‘ Oh better wrong and strife  
(By nature transient) than this torpid life ;  
Life which the very stars reprove  
As on their silent tasks they move!  
Yet, witness all that stirs in heaven or earth !

<sup>1</sup> *Nature*

In scorn I speak not;—they are what their birth  
And breeding suffer them to be;  
Wild outcasts of society! ’

Either way, is it not one and the same issue that sets up the apparent contest between ‘ I’d rather be a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn’ and ‘ Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay’ ?

We turn to one other side of social life as Emerson, in his day, found it in England across the waters—the keen and wide-spread distress of the politico-economic conditions that gave birth to the Chartist movement and created literary romances like Disraeli’s *Sybil* and the Chartist Parson’s *Alton Locke* besides Carlyle’s burning essay on *Chartism*. How deeply Emerson was stirred into sympathy with the disasters of the disemployed and the unenfranchised under the new iron law of mechanical competition and property qualification, is reflected in the fierce fury of a little poem, *The Chartist’s Complaint*.

“ Day! hast thou two faces,  
Making one place two places ?  
One, by humble farmer seen,  
Chill and wet, unlighted, mean.  
Useful only, triste and damp,  
Serving for a labourer’s lamp ?  
Have the same mists another side,  
To be the appanage of pride,  
Gracing the rich man’s wood and lake  
His park where amber mornings break,

And treacherously bright to show  
His planted isle where roses glow ?  
O Day ! and is your mightiness  
A sycophant to smug success ?  
Will the sweet sky and ocean broad  
Be fine accomplices to fraud ?  
O Sun ! I curse thy cruel ray :  
Back, back to chaos, harlot Day ! ”

For a like intensity of passion and pathos over the woes of social tyranny, one has to repair to the greatest Victorian poetess in such of her pieces as *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*.

Among the poems comprised in the Social or Socio-Political group, the **Ode Inscribed to W. H. Channing**, “ a glowing friend,” the nephew and biographer of the great apostle of Unitarianism, Dr. William Ellery Channing, is full of “ honeyed thought ” befitting its associations and, particularly, the character of the addressee sketched by Garnett in the words, ‘stainless but flighty as the fabled bird of Paradise which has forfeited its foothold in ridding itself of its feet.’

On one side, the Ode freely acclaims the beneficence of the law of material progress.

“ ’Tis fit the forest fall,  
The steep be graded,  
The mountain tunnelled,  
The sand shaded,  
The orchard planted,  
The glebe tilled,  
The prairie granted,  
The steamer built. ”



On the other side, it also expresses lofty impatience with the too materialistic aspects of the culture and civilisation of the age. " Things are of the snake ;" and it is deplorable that men and States should " unking " themselves and be sold into serfdom to them or, in other words, to the secularisms of creature comfort and of private and public greed. Among the enormities of the last-named category that come in specifically for the phials of righteous wrath are :

" the famous States  
Harrying Mexico  
With rifle and with knife ; "

" the jackals of the negro-holder " masquerading in " the freedom-loving mountaineer ;" and the Cossack eating up Poland " like stolen fruit."

" The horseman serves the horse,  
The neatherd serves the neat,  
The merchant serves the purse,  
The eater serves his meat ;  
'Tis the day of the chattel,  
Web to weave, and corn to grind ;  
Things are in the saddle,  
And ride mankind."

Thus public life becomes degraded into a hollow simulacrum.

" Virtue palters ; Right is hence ;  
Freedom praised, but hid ;  
Funeral eloquence  
Rattles the coffin-lid."

But the cure for the nation's dire malady can alone ensue out of individual regeneration into righteousness, the self-consecration of "each one to his chosen work" in the quiet confidence that

"Wise and sure the issues are"

under

"The over-god  
Who marries Right to Might."

Hence, the final word regarding the right relation between the individual and the State is :

"Let man serve law for man ;  
Live for friendship, live for love,  
For truth's and harmony's behoof ;  
The state may follow how it can,  
As Olympus follows Jove."

Such far horizons, far from separativeness, such truly Mazzinian vistas, who could command, we ask, but the spiritual prophet the core of whose message is no other than "First, soul, and second, soul, and evermore, soul"? Have we not, for the like of him, to turn to that other poet-patriot and prophet-philosopher whom, all in all, it will be no disparagement, perhaps, to christen as the Emerson of England with his interpretation of the Deity's 'decree'—

' by the soul

Only, the Nations shall be great and free ' ? <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth : *Near Dover*

To put it in present-day parlance from this standpoint as to Western civilisation, how strongly Emerson would have execrated the soulless estate of the superman or, again, the slaying *kultur* of the militarist German, even as he extolled the saving culture of the idealist German !

### B—Political

Of **Politics** Emerson has a broad and lofty conception, which he defines negatively as well as positively in the poetical preface to the essay upon that subject.

“ Fear, Craft and Avarice  
Cannot rear a State,”

in the face of the stern law,

“ Nor kind nor coinage buys  
Aught above its rate.”

The problem of statecraft is the problem of building “ out of dust ” “ what is more than dust ” with the equal-proportioned cement-blend of personal morality and public duty. The ship of state is safest steered by the compass of righteousness, which alone exalteth a nation, and swiftest wafted by the sails of freedom, ‘ grave mother of majestic works.’<sup>1</sup> The true spirit of republicanism, bred in the bone and coursing through the veins, thus

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson : *Of old sat Freedom on the heights*

finds apt and adequate expression in the all-round ideal of the following passage :—

“ When the Muses nine  
When the Virtues meet,  
Find to their design  
An Atlantic seat,  
By green orchard boughs  
Fended from the heat,  
Where the statesman ploughs  
Furrow for the wheat,—  
When the Church is social worth,  
When the state-house is the hearth,  
Then the perfect State is come,  
The republican at home.”

The poetry of freedom ever marks one of the richest veins in the mine of all literature. And the ores of Emerson's contribution to it are of no mean order of merit. Among his own poems, the verses entitled **Freedom** and **Voluntaries** and the commemorative political Odes are assuredly some of the best and best known along with Lowell's *Commemoration Ode* recited in 1865 at the Harvard ceremonies in honour of those *alumni* who fell when Right and Wrong stood facing each other in the shock of battle. They form altogether a golden constellation resplendent with what Henry James calls ‘a kind of high, vertical moral light,’ namely, spiritual passion for the broad equities of liberty, equality and fraternity for all, kindled by a Wordsworthian ‘love for the human creature's

absolute self.'<sup>1</sup> They afford a glimpse into the tremendous impetus lent by literature in those stirring times to the applied liberalism of the War of Independence and the later crusade against Slavery. No one who now reads through those noble paeans so sung forth then

“ That the slave who caught the strain  
Should throb until he snapped his chain,”<sup>2</sup>

can himself help a throb over the omnipotent oneness of the faith and fervour, the force and fire, gratefully acknowledged by Longfellow in his Dedicatory Lines to Channing—

‘ Go on, until this land revokes  
The old and chartered lie,  
The feudal curse whose  
Whips and yokes insult humanity.’

To Emerson, as taught of “ the Spirit,”  
Freedom is a

“ Name not lightly to be said,  
Gift too precious to be prayed.  
Passion not to be expressed  
But by heaving of the breast.”<sup>3</sup>

And as Tennyson sings,

‘ Of old sat Freedom on the heights,’

<sup>1</sup> *The Prelude*

<sup>2</sup> *Freedom*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

so Emerson adds,

“ wouldst thou the mountain find  
Where this deity is shrined,

... ..

Counsel not with flesh and blood ;  
Loiter not for cloak or food ;  
Right thou feelest, rush to do.” <sup>1</sup>

That is “ Freedom’s secret ” which

“ Blends the starry fates with thine,  
Draws angels nigh to dwell with thee,  
And makes thy thoughts archangels be ” <sup>2</sup>

—even the same as Tennyson’s reading of martial  
heroism sealed in blood,

‘ Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die.’

Accordingly, as the stern logic of events dissolved all misgivings about “ intrusion into another sphere,” it crystallised the catholic philosopher’s sympathy quite into the civic patriot’s support. For him the deadly conflict between “ daily wrongs ” and “ Eternal Rights ” <sup>3</sup> over

“ the chain  
Which bound the dusky tribe ” <sup>4</sup>

raised the crucial problem,

“ In an age of fops and toys,  
Wanting wisdom, void of right,

<sup>1</sup> *Freedom*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *Voluntaries*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

Who shall nerve heroic boys  
To hazard all in Freedom's fight ? " <sup>1</sup>

The poet-prophet's voice, like a veritable Peter the Hermit's, " wafted the breath of grace divine " in the memorable and profound words previously cited from the inspiring song on *Voluntaries* :

" So nigh is grandeur to our dust,  
So near is God to man,  
When Duty whispers low, *Thou must*,  
The youth replies, *I can*."

So, like the Solitary (in *The Excursion*) at

' the unlooked for dawn,  
' That promised everlasting joy to France,'

Emerson now clearly reaffirmed the social implications of the Christian gospel and

' zealously maintained  
The cause of Christ and civil liberty,  
As one, and moving to one glorious end.'

And he solemnly re-echoed the Cassandra-like warning-note of Wordsworth's Wanderer,

' Our life is turned  
Out of her course, wherever man is made  
An offering, or a sacrifice, a tool  
Or implement, a passive thing employed  
As a brute mean, without acknowledgment  
Of common right or interest in the end.'

So was Duty sanctified through the summons and sanction of Divinity. And so went forth the awful fiat of Destiny against vested interests and bribed indifference.

“ Pang for pang your seed shall pay,  
Hide in false peace your coward head,  
I bring round the harvest day.”

By far exquisite alike in passion and polish are the passages in this connection wrought in glorification of Freedom, her assured progress and triumph among all races and the selfless valour consecrated to her cause.

“ Freedom all winged expands,  
Nor perches in a narrow place ;  
Her broad van seeks unplanted lands;  
She loves a poor and virtuous race.

...                      ...                      ...  
Long she loved the Northman well :  
Now the iron age is done.  
She will not refuse to dwell  
With the offspring of the Sun.”

Nay, the rover

“ In climates of the summer star,  
He has avenues to God  
Hid from men of Northern brain.”

Higher ground than this never was, or will be, taken in the plea for universal emancipation, the entire effacement of all demarcation-lines of caste and creed, colour and clime, entailed as a solemn



obligation upon the enjoyers and lovers of freedom with reference to their extension of it to others. Asks Lowell in the same situation and in the same spirit,

“ Is true Freedom but to break  
Fetters for our own dear sake,  
And, with leathern hearts, forget  
That we owe mankind a debt ?  
No ! true freedom is to share  
All the chains our brothers wear,  
And, with heart and hand, to be  
Earnest to make others free ! ’

And here, from the same stand-point as that of

‘ They are slaves  
Who dare not be  
In the right  
With two or three ! ’

here follows, in Emerson, a whole passage animated with the strongest reinforcement for all ‘ Fight for Right ’ movements.

“ O, well for the fortunate soul  
Which Music’s wings infold,  
Stealing away the memory  
Of sorrows new and old !  
Yet happier he whose inward sight,  
Stayed on his subtle thought,  
Shuts his sense on toys of time,  
To vacant bosoms brought.  
But best befriended of the God  
He who, in evil times,  
Warned by an inward voice,

Heeds not the darkness and the dread,  
Biding by his rule and choice,  
Feeling only the fiery thread  
Leading over heroic ground,  
Walled with mortal terror round,  
To the aim which him allures,  
And the sweet heaven his deed secures.

Stainless soldier on the walls,  
Knowing this,—and knows no more,—  
Whoever fights, whoever falls,  
Justice conquers evermore,  
Justice after as before,—  
And he who battles on her side,  
God, though he were ten times slain,  
Crowns him victor glorified,  
Victor over death and pain ;  
Forever : but his erring foe,  
Self-assured that he prevails,  
Looks from his victim lying low,  
And sees aloft the red right arm  
Redress the eternal scales.  
He, the poor foe whom angels foil,  
Blind with pride, and fooled by hate,  
Writhes within the dragon coil,  
Reserved to a speechless fate.”

And, again, the indomitable forces of righteousness  
and retribution—

“ They reach no term, they never sleep,  
In equal strength through space abide ;  
Though, feigning dwarfs, they crouch and creep,  
The strong they slay, the swift outstride.”

Lastly, what brighter bay was ever woven round the  
brows of the heroes of humanity in the cause of

humanity than the characteristically epigrammatic and emphatic panegyric at the close ?

“ Speak it firmly, these are gods,  
All are ghosts beside.”

### C—Occasional or Commemorative

Of productions called forth by occasions of national commemoration we have no more than five, whether hymns or odes. But these have made their mark as pulsing high with a strong love of country and of the country's liberty and destiny in all planes and as spiritualising the events commemorated into so many hallowed sacraments.

The patriotic inspirations softly imbibed in his Concord residence—patriotic alike in the national and in the dynastic sense for one who traced his descent from the founder of that settlement—are voiced by this most illustrious of her scions in the noble **Concord Hymn**, sung at the completion of the Concord Monument and graven thereon in 1836 on the sixty-first anniversary-day of the Battle of Lexington and the birth of American Independence. The “ votive stone ” set on the “ green bank ” and by the “ soft stream,” where

“ once the embattled farmers stood  
And fired the shot heard round the world,”

is consecrated into

“ The shaft we raised to them and thee ”

—the

“ Spirit, that made those heroes dare  
To die, or leave their children free.”

By the way, that markedly terse, transcendent expression, “fired the shot heard round the world,” is one that will be readily recognised as having already passed into the group of the commonplaces of quotation in the modern litany of Liberty. The poem itself is appraised by Matthew Arnold as a piece of good work, ‘a plain, forcible, inevitable whole,’ making a fine exception to the rule of such ‘ineffective work’ as the next two songs are pronounced by him to be. The ground of exception is found by both O. W. Holmes and Garnett in this, that originality of style is here superseded by the manner of Campbell.

The **Fourth of July Ode** is associated also with Concord as having been sung in its Town-Hall in 1857 on the eighty-first return of the red-letter day of the Declaration of Independence. This Ode turns, indeed, to admirable account the mighty traditions of that epoch-making tempest-turmoil. Amid the already clamant bursts of the Abolitionist after *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and like flashes even of the Apocalypse, it commingles with a just pride in prior achievements for colonial ‘whitemanity’ a juster passion for the stamp and signet of humanity under a swarthier skin.

“ United States ! the ages plead,—  
Present and Past in under-song,—

Go put your creed into your deed,  
Nor speak with double tongue."

So sounds the trumpet-blast for a thorough effacement, on principle and not out of policy, of the ugly bondman-blot in the escutcheon of the Republic. And such is the kindling challenge for translating into the maxim of practical polity the commandment of Scripture—"Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you"—and for compelling the golden rule of ethical and spiritual conviction to bear down all fiscal and economic calculations.

"Be just at home ; then write your scroll  
Of honour o'er the sea  
And bid the broad Atlantic roll  
A ferry of the free.

"And, henceforth, there shall be no chain,  
Save underneath the sea  
The wires shall murmur through the main  
Sweet songs of Liberty."

'A poet's use' (in Garnett's phrase) is thus made of the laying of the submarine cable previously alluded to in the study of *The Adirondacs*. And thus, altogether, is voiced a magnificent dream and demand of peace on earth and good-will among men

"ripe of Saxon kind  
To build an equal state,—  
To take the statute from the mind,  
And make of duty fate."

No wonder if, fired by this ardour of 'the Vision of the world and all the wonder that would be,' our 'philosopher of democracy' proclaims, during the national rejoicings, that

"The cannon booms from town to town,  
Our pulses are not less."

How beautifully, too, the responses of the outer to the inner world are set out in the words,

"One morn is in the mighty heaven,  
And one in our desire,"

and, again,

"The conscious stars accord above,  
The waters wild below,  
And under, through the cable wove,  
Her fiery errands go.

"For He that worketh high and wise  
Nor pauses in his plan,  
Will take the sun out of the skies  
Ere freedom out of man." !

'Was he conscious of the echo of Campbell in the last stanza?' is Garnett's query in this connection.

Later and once more in the course of the civil cataclysm and with the solemn authority of the old but ever new announcement, 'Thus sayeth the Lord,' the **Boston Hymn of New Year's Day, 1863**, read by the author himself in Music Hall to celebrate the signing by Abraham Lincoln of the Proclamation freeing the Southern slaves,

itself proclaims the principle of absolute republicanism broad-based upon freedom and fraternity. It suggests thereby a fruitful comparison, on one side, with Carlyle's plea for benevolent despotism and, on the other, with Tennyson's passion against 'the red fool-fury of the Seine'—two positions illustrative only of 'the falsehood of extremes.' Well does Hutton draw the pointed distinction, 'He (Emerson) had a genuine desire to see all men really free, while Carlyle felt the desire to see all men strongly governed'—a distinction which also lies back of the two respective concepts of 'representative men' and 'heroes.'

"God said, I am tired of kings.

I suffer them no more :

Up to my ear the morning brings

The outrage of the poor.

"Think ye I made this ball

A field of havoc and war,

Where tyrants great and tyrants small

Might harry the weak and poor ?

"My angel, his name is Freedom,—

Choose him to be your king ;

He shall cut pathways east and west,

And fend you with his wing."

As with kingships, so with all aristocracies of birth and wealth. High though their 'title, power and pelf,' they shall have no part or lot in the government of the people *by* the people and *for* the people, such alone being the soul of true democracy.

“ I will have never a noble,  
No lineage counted great;  
Fishers and choppers and ploughmen  
Shall constitute a state.

“ Call the people together.  
The young men and the sires,  
The digger in the harvest field,  
Hireling, and him that hires.”

Further, the ardent worshipper of heroism and culture and genius thus provides in the constitution for the elected leadership of merit in different spheres—

“ And here in a pine state-house  
They shall choose men to rule  
In every needful faculty,  
In church, and state, and school.”

And, as guaranteed by the name, among others, of Abraham Lincoln, President at the time, the laws of the state shall be, as they ought to be, just—

“ just laws below the sun,  
As planets faithful be. ”

They shall be righteous and “ beware from right to swerve.” They shall be humane, helping “ them who cannot help again,” forasmuch as “ ’Tis nobleness to serve.” Lastly, they shall be such as

“ Cause from every creature  
His proper good to flow :  
As much as he is and doeth,  
So much he shall bestow.”



But then, this consummation devoutly to be wished must remain only a fond dream, even a foolish mockery, in the face of "your bonds and master-ships"—a broad hint, by the way, throwing a lurid side-light upon the current controversy of 'Home-Rule-o-mania *versus* Caste-o-phobia' in the New India of today ! Hence, the trump of rescue sounds for the slave—

" Free be his heart and hand henceforth  
As wind and wandering wave."

To improve off this iniquity of slavery, continues the flaming "word of the Lord," is not merely the part of generosity or even of justice but a prerequisite of true national efficiency, a condition precedent to the very self-realisation of the nation.

" Today unbind the captive,  
So only are ye unbound."

Notice here how the tables are effectively turned as between slave and owner. Yes, 'effectively'—for, we have recorded, in his *Partial Portraits*, Henry James's personal evidence as an eye-witness to 'the momentousness of the occasion, the vast excited multitude, the crowded platform and the tall, spare figure of Emerson in the midst' and 'the immense effect with which his beautiful voice pronounced the lines'—

" Pay ransom to the owner,  
And fill the bag to the brim."

Who is the owner ? The slave is owner,  
And ever was. Pay him."

Next, the divine benediction upon the down-trodden—God's images cut in ebony :

" Up ! and the dusky race  
That sat in darkness long,—  
Be swift their feet as antelopes,  
And as behemoth strong."

Finally, the conclusion with its mountain-air invigoration for all toilers towards an ' ampler day ' :

" Come, East and West and North,  
By races, as snow-flakes,  
And carry my purpose forth,  
Which neither halts nor shakes.

" My will fulfilled shall be,  
For, in daylight or in dark,  
My thunderbolt has eyes to see  
His way home to the mark."

Another striking expression of civic and national patriotism is the Ode<sup>1</sup> read in Faneuil Hall on December 16, 1873, on the Centennial Anniversary of the Destruction of the Tea in the Harbour of Boston, "thou darling town of ours."

" O happy town beside the sea,  
Whose roads lead everywhere to all;  
Than thine no deeper moat can be,  
No stouter fence, no steeper wall !"

<sup>1</sup> Unaccountably excluded from the Everyman's Library Edition

This poem, belonging to the 'piping times of peace,' must at once impress itself as more soft but not less spirited, and more happy in the simple device of art yet not less remarkable for the noble passion for freedom, than the two earlier productions of 1857 and 1863 noticed above. It first recounts the welcome of the mountains to the "stern and poor" "Saxon men" "of yore" who "went on trade intent"—for "the world was made for honest trade"—and proved (unlike in these all too unholy times) that "the merchant was a man."

‘ The waves that rocked them on the deep  
To them their secret told ;  
Said the winds that sung the lads to sleep,  
‘ Like us be free and bold !’  
The honest waves refuse to slaves  
The empire of the ocean caves.”

Then, the 'settlement' and its expansion by Boston Bay with "rival towers majestic"

‘ Along the stormy coast,  
Penn's town, New York, and Baltimore.”

“ And where the western hills declined,  
The prairie stretched away.”

Further on, the basic principle of public polity in this "city of the poor" :

“ The noble craftsman we promote,  
Disown the knave and fool ;  
Each honest man shall have his vote,  
Each child shall have his school.”

“ We grant no dukedoms to the few,  
 We hold like rights, and shall,—  
 Equal on Sunday in the pew,  
 On Monday in the mall.  
 For what avail the plough or sail,  
 Or land, or life, if freedom fail ? ”

Next, the story of the clash with the mother-country and the part of Boston therein, told in a strain of sly humour :

“ Bad news from George on the English throne :  
 ‘ You are thriving well,’ said he;  
 ‘ Now by these presents be it known,  
 You shall pay us a tax on tea ;  
 ’Tis very small,—no load at all,—  
 Honour enough that we send the call.’

“ ‘Not so,’ said Boston, ‘ good my lord,

... ..

(Your Highness knows our homely word,)  
 Millions for self-government,  
 But for tribute never a cent.’

“ The cargo came ! and who could blame  
 If *Indians* seized the tea,  
 And, chest by chest, let down the same  
 Into the laughing sea ?  
 For what avail the plough or sail,  
 Or land, or life, if freedom fail ? ”

Lastly, the sequel that proved how “ right is might through all the world,” winding up with a grateful benediction on Boston and the proud memory of “ the blood of her hundred thousands.” “ God with

the fathers, so with us !” Noble sentiments nobly sung and worthy of no mean place in a thesaurus of the finest poet-lore of liberty wedded to nationality under the all-holy priesthood of the Spirit in Nature ! Quickening messages, too, even for this very hour and moment, of the ruin of autocracies and the rise of democracies all over—messages from the land, and in the language, of Woodrow Wilson, the practical idealist of universal independence and the master-mason of the Temple of Peace for the coming ‘ League of Nations ’ ! Altogether, one more signal instance of the truth that ‘ When a true poet lifts nationality to the level of art, it becomes a far more potent force than it is at the level of prose ! ’ <sup>1</sup>

A third poem connected, too, with Boston will conclude our study of the Poems of Public Life—the Hymn sung at the Second (Unitarian) Church of that place during the ordination of its minister, the Rev. Chandler Robbins, in 1833, the year after Emerson’s own resignation of its pastorate. Pertaining though to congregational religious life and properly falling under the group of Poems of Religion yet to be taken up, it is briefly noticed here as being an occasional and commemorative poem with some public significance, however restricted. The hymn is short. But it is replete with the tenderest sentiments of the spiritual life

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Cousins : *Modern Poetry in the English Language*

enriched with the institutional heritage of united  
aspiration and endeavour at

“ the venerable house  
Our fathers built to God.”

“ For faith, and peace, and mighty love,  
That from the Godhead flow,  
Showed them the life of Heaven above  
Springs from the life below.”

## CHAPTER IX

### POEMS OF BEAUTY AND LOVE

We next turn to another main division—the Poems dedicated to Beauty and Love. Sweetest and holiest of the passions and possessions of the human soul, Beauty and Love have evermore carried with them a deeper stimulus and satisfaction than even Truth and Wisdom ; while Purity and Peace have only waited upon them as condition and consequence respectively. Indeed, as the vital sap of the mighty Tree of Igdrasil, of which all the art of poetry is the flower and all the philosophy of life the fruit, Beauty and Love, together, have been the world-old theme of the thinker, the age-long afflatus of the poet, the ever-raining heavenly manna of the saint. The sublimation of their grosser elements being the ultimate test of the purity and penetration of the seer's vision, Emerson's conceptions in this regard must assure for him a rank of no mean order among the secret-spellers of all time.

In his intuitive grasp of their interrelation, Beauty and Love run like two golden threads entwined into the diamond knot of that spiritual experience which unifies the love of beauty with the beauty of love. This, for one thing, renders

difficult any clean-cut classification of the poems devoted to the two subjects in question. Another peculiarity is that, on these subjects, Emerson seems somewhat to incline towards the 'metaphysical school' of poetry, not, however, with far-fetched conceits but, after Andrew Marvell, the Puritan poet, with playful poetic phantasies fraught with deeper significances.

Of such tender interest, chiefly, are **Rubies ; To Eva ; The Amulet ; Eros ; Thine Eyes Still Shined ;** and **To Ellen**—the last two of these being directly addressed to the author's first wife and half revealing his own love story. "Rubies from the mine," for instance, are, at first sight, so many

" drops of frozen wine  
From Eden's vats."

But, in truth, they are "tides that should warm each neighbouring life," locked, however, "in sparkling stone," in "ruddy snow," against the advent of the thawing fire of reciprocation. The "chaste-glowing" eyes of the "fair and stately maid" have been

" kindled in the upper skies  
At the same torch that "

has lighted those of the attracted. And hence "the sweet dominion" of the one over the will of the other, "a sympathy divine." The cus-



tomary amulets of love—picture, ring and letter, bonds and vows—are but “torments ” through

“ the fear that love  
Died in its last expression.”

And hence the result is a fond, wistful longing for still more adequate tokens that “ can certify possession ” and keep intelligence up to date—

“ Red when you love, and rosier red,  
And when you love not, pale and blue.”

The yearning to love and be beloved is an elemental property of human nature.

“ Men and gods have not outlearned it ;  
And how oft soe'er they've turned it,  
'Tis not to be improved.”

And as observed in the charming verses of 1830 addressed to the beautiful and accomplished Ellen, already referred to as “ a bright revelation to me of the best nature of woman,” it is the part of love to behold the beloved everywhere—the shine of her eye in the evening star, the dance of her form in “ the deep-eyed dew ” on hill and pasture and the script of her name in the redbird's “ side of flame ” and in “ the rosebud ripened to the rose.” There reigns a spiritual law of responsiveness between human loveliness and the natural elements. So that the spring-tune of “ the nimble zephyr ” perfumed and worshipped by “ the Flowers—tiny sect of Shakers—” goes forth as

“ the winning sound ” of invitation to the dearest and fairest in the name of “ the pausing lover.”

These soft-stirring sentiments, again, are rehearsed in the song named after **Hermione**, embodying an Arab lover’s “ sweet regrets ” for his sweetheart carried off by a Syrian rival. Beauty, as we gather therefrom, is not merely beautiful “ but sceptred genius, aye inorbed ” and absorbing

“ The lustre of the land and ocean,  
Hills and islands, cloud and tree.  
In her form and motion.

...                      ...                      ...  
Mountains and the misty plains  
Her colossal portraiture ;  
They her heralds be  
Steeped in her quality.”

Hence, too, as Nature, in her kaleidoscopic panorama of aspects, unveils the form of human beauty through “ twinkling glade and twilight nook,” “ out of the forest way ” and up from the throbbing brook, so in Nature and in

“ strict resort  
To winds and waterfalls,  
And autumn’s sunlit festivals.  
To music, and to music’s thought,  
Inextricably bound,”

in these lies the surest key to the recovery of the lost enjoyment of beauty and love. The “ meteor-glance ” of beauty and the magic-touch of love

are alone the mighty redeemers of the self from itself. And by their influence alone the " hermit vowed to books and gloom " turns to talk " at large of worldly fate " and draw " truly every trait." In them and through them is all union and insight.

" Once I dwelt apart.  
Now I live with all ;  
As shepherd's lamp on far hill-side  
Seems, by the traveller espied,  
A door into the mountain heart,  
So didst thou quarry and unlock  
Highways for me through the rock."

Then, in a note all too solemn and profound, the poem headed **To Rhea** conveys a warning to the deaf and blind that the redemptions referred to are not possible on selfish and sensuous terms but wholly conditional on selfless soul-devotion, the *nishkāma bhakti* and *seva* of our own *Lay of the Lord*.

" Who drinks of Cupid's nectar cup  
Loveth downward, and not up "

Therefore, to love and serve, " not for a private good " but from one's own beatitude, and to do so increasingly in proportion as one is scorned and rejected—this is the mark of godlike wisdom, which alone is calculated

" To carry man to new degrees  
Of power, and of comeliness."

It is at once the truest tribute to "the All-Good, All-Fair" and the sweetest salve for the disappointments of non-requital or the tearings-off of "the bandages of purple light."

And yet, to the same end, another love-lyric, **Give All to Love**, directly suggestive of Wordsworth's famous couplet,

' Give all thou canst; high Heaven rejects the lore  
Of nicely-calculated less or more,'

couples with the same call to absolute self-surrender unto the dominance of love a new charge to alert self-emancipation from the thralldom of the beloved that has ceased to love in undivided heart-fulness and yielded harbour to the "first vague shadow of surmise" "of a joy apart from thee." In fine, if the idol break, see to it that it shatters not with it the ideal as well.

" Let it have scope:  
Follow it utterly,  
Hope beyond hope."

At the same time,

" Heartily know,  
When half gods go,  
The gods arrive."

As indicated in a poem by that name, the **Lover's Petition to God**, the " Good Heart, that ownest all," is naturally for nothing beyond the

love of "one proper creature," "a solitary heart"—assuredly no

"mean demand.  
For 'tis the concentration  
And worth of all the land,  
The sister of the sea,  
The daughter of the strand,  
Composed of air and light,  
And of the swart earth-might."

And if Love is thus the concentration of all the essence of earth and sky without which "the world were better left alone," "the duration of a glance" is, again, its all too sufficient "term of convenience." For, as added in the verses entitled **The Visit**,

"Riding on the ray of sight,  
Fleeter far than whirlwinds go,  
Or for service or delight,  
Hearts to hearts their meaning show.  
...                      ...                      ...  
Single look has drained the breast ;  
Single moment years confessed."

Next, on the concept of **Beauty**, we have a delightful poem with that name, prefiguring its ultimate nature and attributes. A hovering gleam to be chased

"everywhere,  
In flame, in storm, in clouds of air";

feasting the eye upon "the beryl beam of the broken wave"; enchanting the ear, now with "the moment's music" of the pebble flung into the lake, and now with the peal of

"a lofty tone  
From nodding pole and belting zone,"

aye, "from centred and from errant sphere"—such is Beauty evermore to the Transcendentalist. Nay, more:

"The quaking earth did quake in rhyme,  
Seas ebb'd and flow'd in epic chime.  
In dens of passion, and pits of woe,  
He saw strong Eros struggling through,  
To sun the dark and solve the curse,  
And beam to the bounds of the universe."

Little wonder, then, that the "loyal worship" of this lofty vision has ever counted

"it happier to be dead,  
To die for Beauty, than live for bread."

One other poem, the **Ode to Beauty**, takes this theme further into the holy of holies and foreshadows how and why the sense of the beautiful is always the sense of the sublime. Firstly, Beauty, all-pervading, is invoked as the

"Guest of million painted forms  
Which in turn thy glory warms";

and this in close parallelism with, through a wider sweep than, the lines in Shelley's *Hymn To Intellectual Beauty*,

' Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate  
With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon  
Of human thought or form ! '

Thus it is that

" The frailest leaf, the mossy bark,  
The acorn's cup, the raindrop's arc,  
The swinging spider's silver line,  
The ruby of the drop of wine,  
The shining pebble of the pond,  
Thou inscribest with a bond,  
In thy momentary play,  
Would bankrupt nature to repay."

Secondly, as witness the romantic passion of Endymion, the magnetism of Beauty, " sweet tyrant of all," is glorified as holding the key to the human breast and " melting " the soul, " new-born," " into nature again."

" Thy dangerous glances  
Make women of men."

And why this resistless potency for the reflex action of a new birth ? Even because man's

" opulent soul  
Has mingled with the generous whole ";

so much so that

“ Oft, in streets or humblest places,  
I detect far-wandered graces,  
Which, from Eden wide astray,  
In lowly homes have lost their way.”

Mark, the Infinite One has granted His throne to Beauty; and it is the *sundaram* within that discerns, and delights in, the *sundaram* without. Beauty is the very substance of the Eternal Himself, endlessly weaving ‘ at the roaring Loom of Time,’ into the warp and woof of hue and harmony, ‘ the garment thou seest Him by ’; eternal fugitive, consequently,

“ gliding through the sea of form,  
Like the lightning through the storm,”

whom

“ No feet so fleet could ever find,  
No perfect form could ever bind.”

Yet, through the manifold of phenomena, all the wealth of form and feature—alike “ all that’s good and great ” and all that is “ dark and lonely,” “ the leafy dell, the city mart,” “ the cold and purple morning,” “ e’en the flowing azure air,” dreams and death “ in Being’s deeps past ear and eye ”—all, all shine forth as the resplendent reflex of Divine Beauty.

“ Dread Power, but dear ! if God thou be,  
Unmake me quite, or give thyself to me !”



From the section on Beauty to that on Love we pass on over the mystic bridge of the crisp aphorism in Rabindranath's *Stray Birds*: 'The Perfect decks itself in beauty for the love of the imperfect.' And now we come to listen to the noble chant of Love—world-warming, all-equalising, soul-expanding Love—pealing through the lines on Etienne De La Boece:

“ And worship that world-warming spark  
Which dazzles me in midnight dark,  
Equalizing small and large,  
While the soul it doth surcharge,  
That the poor is wealthy grown,  
And the hermit never alone,—  
The traveller and the road seems one  
With the errand to be done.”

One of the few longer poems in the whole volume, the dissertation on **Initial, Daemonic and Celestial Love**, treats of the different phases of that sentiment in its origin, expression and fulfilment. It abounds in a rich vein of true poetry—poetry wrapped in soft Lydian airs. The rhythmic dance of its shifting measure, the polished elegance of its significant diction and the playful yet penetrative insight of its spiritual thought—all combine to make the descant a true representative poem from the pen of a prose-rhapsodist, though upon a subject apparently unfitted for concrete treatment, especially in its latter part.

The first portion is taken up with a quaint

description of the ways and wiles, the power and potency, of Cupid, "the god of sport," "the young-eyed emperor of love."

"He bears no bow, or quiver, or wand,  
Nor chaplet on his head or hand."

No blind boy he, as pictured by the erring painter ;  
but "radiant, sharpest-sighted god," he lives in his eyes—"those unfathomable orbs" in which he absorbs every function and around, underneath, within, above whose circles is writ "Love—love—love—love."

"He rolls them with delighted motion,  
Joy-tides swell their mimic ocean,"

as they

"seize and entertain  
The glance that to their glance opposes,  
Like fiery honey sucked from roses."

And, as by the glance of the eye, so, too, by the touch of the hand, he imparts and imbibes the subtle intelligence of the palmistry of love, thus happily recalling 'These lovers parted by the touch of hands' from Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*.

"The pulse of hands will make him mute ;  
With all his force he gathers balms  
Into those wise, thrilling palms."

"A casuist,  
A mystic, and a cabalist,"

"versed in occult science,  
In magic, and in clairvoyance,"

he keeps his faculties high-strung and on the tiptoe of pain to surprise all "lurking thought" and be soothed by "omens" and "chance-dropped hints from Nature's sphere." Possessed of a wealth of resource and embassy—"ushers" and "heralds high," "a total world of wit" and wise discourse, boundless memory and "plans immense"—and "meaning always to be young."

"He spreads his welcome where he goes,  
And touches all things with his rose,  
All things wait for and divine him.

... ..

He is a Pundit of the East,  
He is an augur and a priest.  
And his soul will melt in prayer.

... ..

There is no mask but he will wear ;  
He invented oaths to swear ;  
He paints, he carves, he chants, he prays,  
And holds all stars in his embrace,  
Godlike ;     ...     ...

... ..

He has not one mode, but manifold,  
Many fashions and addresses,  
Piques, reproaches, hurts, caresses,  
Arguments, lore, poetry,  
Action, service, badinage.  
He will preach like a friar,  
And jump like a Harlequin ;  
He will read like a crier,  
And fight like a Paladin."

This "arch-hypocrite," inasmuch as "he follows joy and only joy"

"And his wish is intimacy,  
Intimater intimacy,  
And a stricter privacy,"

"He takes a sovran privilege  
Not allowed to any liege;  
For he does go behind all law,  
And right into himself does draw."

Again, how wondrous the capacity for self-adaptation and self-adjustment shown by this sorcerer of the sweetest snares!

"He is wilful, mutable,  
Shy, untamed, inscrutable,  
Swifter-fashioned than the fairies,  
Substance mixed of pure contraries;  
His vice some elder virtue's token,  
And his good is evil-spoken."

Thus in ways and by means and with effects passing strange would Cupid achieve the miracle-mystery of the one in two and the two in one.

"As the wave breaks to foam on shelves,  
Then runs into a wave again,  
So lovers melt their sundered selves,  
Yet melted would be twain."

Such is Emerson's account of the physico-psychology of the primal love-emotion—"Heaven's oldest blood," as he christens it happily. Speaking of the prose version of it as given in the Essay

on *Love*, Garnett acknowledges how Emerson has ' painted, as hardly any other has painted, the beauty of personal relations and the " mighty ravishment " of the passion of love.' Within the range of Western lore, it finds a curious parallel and illustration in the mediaeval allegory of *The Romaunt of the Rose*.<sup>1</sup> Well-nigh as subtle and far-reaching as the Indian poets' analysis of *sringararasam*, may it not readily approve itself as realistic yet refined in the extreme, concrete yet not coarse in the least ? But, after all, this aspect of Love, as being " Initial Love," is, however engaging, only of the earth, earthy ; of the senses, sensuous, " the social quintessence of self." And, as beautifully set forth at the opening of the second part, the " selfish preference " of this love of woman for sensual pleasure goes so far as to sweep aside even the hallowed attachments of blood as hoary as life itself.

" Man was made of social earth,  
Child and brother from his birth,  
Tethered by a liquid cord  
Of blood through veins of kindred poured.  
Next his heart the fireside band  
Of mother, father, sister, stand :  
Names from awful childhood heard  
Throbs of a wild religion stirred ;—  
Virtue, to love, to hate them, vice ;  
Till dangerous Beauty came, at last,

<sup>1</sup> LI. 4736-69

Till Beauty came to snap all ties ;  
The maid, abolishing the past,  
With lotus wine obliterates  
Dear memory's stone-incarved traits."

But the play of this impulse is there, only as  
" something rudimentary, ancillary and preparatory to the liberal use and the perfect knowledge of life. Nature's lure to a higher end, ' only one scene in one play.' " Hence, under the very breath of God, the " smoke in the flame " comes all to be consumed away by degrees. And (lo and behold!) we witness love sublimated into cheery self-abnegation in domestic service and into expansive self-realisation through universal unity. As higher and higher rounds are climbed along " the heavenly stair," the reach of loving eyes

" shall yet be more profound,  
And a vision without bound :  
The axis of those eyes sun-clear  
Be the axis of the sphere."

The next higher stage above " Initial " is marked by " Daemonic Love," in which the Daemon hovering round each human soul, " for watch, and ward, and furtherance," finds its greater good in surrender to

" its counterpart,  
Translucent through the mortal covers."

Nevertheless, the " nectar smacks of wine " still. For, " The Daemons are self-seeking " with a " fierce and liminary will "; and their intent is but enlightened selfishness and fortune-hunting — " a weed of self and schism " wanting

" root  
In the core of God's abysm."

This firmest root and its fullest fruitage must needs remain unattained until the self has ceased to see in other selves mere instruments for its own enjoyment, or, even coadjutors towards its own aggrandisement. In other words, the *summum bonum* of life is bound to be missed so long as the centre has not shifted from the self to all other selves everywhere and the circumference has not widened far enough to lie nowhere.

' Learn, by a mortal yearning, to ascend—  
Seeking a higher object. Love was given,  
Encouraged, sanctioned, chiefly for that end ;  
For this the passion to excess was driven—  
That self might be annulled : her bondage prove  
The fetters of a dream, opposed to love.'

—Such the final message of ' the dear Shade ' of Wordsworth's Protesilaus to his ' impassioned Queen,' Laodamia. In the plainer language of *The Prelude*, the ' delight impassioned ' of the love of ' the One who is thy choice of all the

world ' must surely remain, or sink into,

' delight how pitiable !

Unless this love by a still higher love  
Be hallowed, love that breathes not without awe ;  
Love that adores, but on the knees of prayer,  
By heaven inspired ; that frees from chains the soul,  
Lifted, in union with the purest, best,  
Of earth-born passions on the wings of praise,  
Bearing a tribute to the Almighty's Throne.'

Such, too, the ultimate deliverance of Emerson upon the theme before us.

That being the case, only when, in affectional as in cognitive life, the self goes out of itself to return to itself in perfect self-realisation is the highest, holiest, heavenliest love reached in the culmination celebrated as " Celestial Love " in the third part of the poem. In this last and loftiest stage, Love—all-explaining, all-equalising, all-embracing, all-enduring —transforms itself into

" Highest Love who shines on all ;  
Him, radiant, sharpest-sighted god,  
None can bewilder ;  
Whose eyes pierce  
The universe,  
Path-finder, road-builder,  
Mediator, royal giver ;  
Rightly seeing, rightly seen,  
Of joyful and transparent mien.  
'Tis a sparkle passing  
From each to each, from thee to me,



To and fro perpetually ;  
Sharing all, daring all,  
Levelling, displacing  
Each obstruction, it unites  
Equals remote, and seeming opposites  
And ever and for ever Love  
Delights to build a road :  
Unheeded Danger near him strides,  
Love laughs, and on a lion rides."

Here, in the pure light of the truth of all philosophy and religion, insight and experience—conveyed though with Browningite grotesqueness of art, as Bagehot might characterise it—we are led

" Into vision where all form  
In one only form dissolves ;  
In a region where the wheel,  
On which all beings ride,  
Visibly revolves ;  
Where the starred, eternal worm  
Girds the world with bound and term ;  
Where unlike things are like ;  
Where good and ill,  
And joy and moan,  
Melt into one.  
There, Past, Present, Future, shoot  
Triple blossoms from one root ;  
Substances at base divided  
In their summits are united ;  
There the holy essence rolls,  
One through separate souls ;  
And the sunny Aeon sleeps  
Folding Nature in its deeps ;

And every fair and every good,  
Known in part, or known impure,  
To men below,  
In their archetypes endure."

No mere gorgeous verbalism is here, to be sure; but the variegated splendour of illumined interpretation brought to bear upon 'the greatest thing in the world,'<sup>1</sup> in fact, the one underlying principle of the universe—to wit, the spiritual gravitation of Love. Scaling the heights and sounding the depths of this Love-concept, the poet-seer finds the basic law of Being in that Infinite Heart of Love whose countless petals are all the hosts of spirits and spheres and whose rhythmic pulsations create all differences, while also they harmonise all discords. To reach up and down to this ultimate Substance and Substratum of existence is, he adds, to be redeemed from the

"load  
Of care and toil,  
By lying use bestowed"

in regard to one's share of fortune and favour in the world's career. For, then, all the allotments of life, even the allocations of souls—"kind to kind"—are instantly recognised as preordained and ensured by what Emerson calls "the eternal poles of tendency"—one with Matthew Arnold's God, 'the

<sup>1</sup> Henry Drummond

stream of tendency by which all things strive to fulfil the law of their being.'

" As the overhanging trees  
Fill the lake with images,—  
As garment draws the garment's hem,  
Men their fortunes bring with them."

Accordingly, having regard to the spiritual and spontaneous, idealistic and inevitable character of true love, Nature herself officiates as the priestess-elect and the elements as the approved attestors in the solemnisation of such blessed marriages as are made in heaven. So that convention counts for little where love is a law unto itself.

" There need no vows to bind  
Whom not each other seek, but find.  
They give and take no pledge or oath,—  
Nature is the bond of both :  
No prayer persuades, no flattery fawns,—  
Their noble meanings are their pawns.  
Plain and cold is their address,  
Power have they for tenderness ;  
And so thoroughly is known  
Each other's counsel by his own,  
They can parley without meeting ;  
Need is none of forms of greeting ;  
They can well communicate  
In their innermost estate ;  
When each the other shall avoid,  
Shall each by each be most enjoyed.  
Not with scarfs or perfumed gloves  
Do these celebrate their loves ;

Not by jewels, feasts, and savours,  
 Not by ribbons or by favours,  
 But by the sun-spark on the sea,  
 And the cloud-shadow on the lea.  
 The soothing lapse of morn to mirk,  
 And the cheerful round of work.  
 Their cords of love so public are,  
 They intertwine the farthest star :  
 The throbbing sea, the quaking earth,  
 Yield sympathy and signs of mirth ;  
 Is none so high, so mean is none,  
 But feels and seals this union ;  
 Even the fell Furies are appeased,  
 The good applaud, the lost are eased."

At the same time, even as wedlock is no end in itself but the supreme means to the realisation of life, we are reminded of the solemn truth of King Arthur's admonition to Sir Lancelot that 'Free love, so bound, were freest'; that is, that love cannot in reality range above law but may alone fulfil itself in and through knowing its freedom as nothing in itself save the freedom to embrace the law of perfect loyalty and passionless service in the light of the highest good revealed unto it and in the spirit of

'Our wills are ours, to make them Thine,'<sup>1</sup>

or

'while inspired

By choice, and conscious that the Will is free,  
 (We) shall move unswerving, even as if impelled  
 By strict necessity.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson : *In Memoriam*

<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth : *The Excursion*

So, with due regard to the relative claims of the four great ends of *dharma*, *ardha*, *kāma* and *mokṣha* and in the secret strength of our own sacred vow, ' Lord of the universe, Thou the all-conscious and supreme Deity, blissful Pervader of all, only at Thy bidding and for the world's behoof and for Thy pleasure would I follow the pilgrimage of life,'<sup>1</sup> the true lover and householder courts, and submits to, social disciplines providing adequate sanction, stimulus and scope for life's arduous duties. The environments that engender love may and must also avail to ennoble it, as the fire in brighter blaze swallows up the darkening smoke of its own producing or (to adopt an analogy in common vogue among Indian philosophers) as whole forests of trees are burnt up with the help of the very spark generated by their own friction. Evermore, while he may not be absolutely destroyed, *Manmadha*, the god of desire, needs to be rendered formless, freed from the grossness of the flesh—in a word, chastened, etherealised, spiritualised—by the hidden, consuming fire of the austere penance, even the penance of the God of Terror (*Rudra*) as of Beneficence (*Siva*). Hence the peroration in the poem :

" Love's hearts are faithful, but not fond,  
Bound for the just, but not beyond ;

<sup>2</sup> *Lokeśa chaithanyamayadhīdeva mangalya viśhno bhavadājñayaiva hithaya lokasya thavapriyārdham samsarayaithramanuvārthaiśhye.*

Not glad, as the low-loving herd,  
Of self in other still preferred,  
But they have heartily designed  
The benefit of broad mankind.  
And they serve men austere-ly,  
After their own genius, clearly,  
Without a false humility ;  
For this is Love's nobility,—  
Not to scatter bread and gold,  
Goods and raiment bought and sold ;  
But to hold fast his simple sense,  
And speak the speech of innocence,  
And with hand and body and blood  
To make his bosom counsel good.  
For he that feeds men serveth few ;  
He serves all who dares be true "

This subtle and sublime story of " the true astronomy " of love rising, in ever-widening rings of self, home and humanity on the eternal firmament of ' the One without a second ' in all and above all, from woman as the plaything in passion to woman as the partner of prosperity and, finally, to woman as the co-pilgrim towards perfection—where, we may ask, is it surpassed in its impassioned grandeur and inspiring nobleness ? Doubtless, it deserves to be set side by side with Swinburne's love-psalms of matchless magnificence like the prelude to that most charming of lyrical epics, *Tristram of Lyonesse*, and alongside, too, of the paeans to woman and wedlock enshrined in the works and lives of such laureates

of Love as Wordsworth, Tennyson, the Brownings, Rossetti and Ruskin. It even makes an appropriate and highly profitable refresher lesson upon the renowned Canticle of Heavenly Love in the immortal production of Thomas A Kempis.<sup>1</sup> So, may it not, in its practical bearings, help somewhat to readjust, if not to refute, fashionable deprecations of Western life and culture as wholly given over to the thralldom of the senses—and this, despite the dissolute abandon of a dandiical section of people and the voluptuous tone of a dilettante type of society novel and drama ?

At this point the verses on **Cupido** (missed out in the Everyman's Library edition) may be touched upon as somewhat of a small pendant to the afore-said poem like *April to May-Day*. They briefly characterise the god of love as never erring, though "with bandaged eyes" according to the traditional image, but, rather, as all-blinding with his white light, all-prevailing through "the solid, solid universe" and all-reconciling by "mystic wiles" wrought alike upon "the evil and the good."

Agreeably to his exalted view of the primacy of love in the constitution of life, the poet, in a sweet little ditty of that name, links **Love and Thought** together, under the appellations of "Eros and the Muse," as "well-assorted"

<sup>1</sup> *The Imitation of Christ*, Bk. IV, Ch. 5

twin-pilgrims through the highways and byways of Nature. Born for each other and aye adorning each other best, "hand in hand the comrades go," from whom is "nothing hidden." And

"They know one only mortal grief  
Past all balsam or relief,  
When, by false companions crossed,  
The pilgrims have each other lost."

Here is the lesson of *Paracelsus*, over again, in another garb: knowledge, of course, is power; but the knowledge of love is alone true knowledge; and that, as already emphasised in the quatrain on *Casella*, is the "test of the poet."

"Never was poet of late or of yore.  
Who was not tremulous with love-lore."

Thus, Love and Thought, Thought and Love—these can brook no divorce from each other in the art of life any more than it is possible to dispense with either of the two prime essentials in the *ars poetica*, of which, consonantly with the note of the poem on *Saadi*, Wordsworth declares,

'If Thought and Love desert us, from that day  
Let us break off all commerce with the Muse.'



## CHAPTER X

### POEMS OF RELIGION

From the Poems of Beauty and Love to the Poems of Religion is a natural transition through the short-cut of the emotions. Doubtless, all over its bed-rock, life is fed by bubbling springs of emotion in the perception and pursuit of truth, wisdom and righteousness, beauty and love. Still, in the aesthetic and affectional field far more than in the cognitive and volitional, the fountains overflow to inundation and at once float the consciousness up to

‘ the shining table-lands

To which our God Himself is moon and sun.’ <sup>1</sup>

The scientist, the philosopher and the moralist, in their own way, may stop short at the skirts of their respective spheres. But, more often, the artist and the lover cannot help the mystic stride into the Beyond that lies within. To those elements of sensibility and experience which enter fully into the making of the reveller in beauty and love are particularly applicable the inimitable words of Blake,

‘ I give you the end of a golden string,  
Only wind it into a ball;  
It will lead you in at Heaven’s gate,  
Built in Jerusalem’s wall.’ <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson: *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*

<sup>2</sup> *Jerusalem*

In Emerson's case, although the consensus of judgment has classed him, broadly speaking, among the Nature-mystics, yet his grip of all the golden strings, as it must be owned, led him in at all the portals to the City of God, more so through the avenues of immediate communion than along the approaches of inferential conclusion. It is to such direct apprehension of the Spirit by the spirit that we give the name of inward religion, a type of faith of which Emerson will stand out for all time as one of the world's rarely genuine seers and persuasive spokesmen even like Wordsworth's Wanderer with his spiritual history compendiously described in the words, 'nor did he believe,— he saw.' Religion, of course, is his peculiar and pre-eminent interest but so conceived as to cover the manifold of all other, and too commonly secularised, interests. While, therefore, in a real sense his whole literary output does constitute an integral part of his *silex scintillans*, his Poems of Religion, as such, remain scanty, compared with those of one like Whittier or Christina Rossetti. And yet they sufficiently bear upon the main aspects of the life divine.

In the lines on **Unity**, the central, cardinal idea in all his philosophy—the oneness of the universe in its essence and energy—is directly traced to

“ a power  
That works its will on age and hour.”

“ Space is ample, east and west.  
But two cannot go abreast.”

Then, in the subtly significant song named after **Brahma**, our own age-long name for “the Nameless of the hundred names,”<sup>1</sup> the integral wholeness and ultimate imperishability of the ‘one Ruler, the Self within all things, who makes the one form manifold,’<sup>2</sup> is set out as a close transcript from the elder Emersons of the hoariest human race. The dictum of the *Kathopanishad* re-employed in the *Gita*, ‘If the killer thinks that he kills, if the killed thinks that he is killed; they do not understand; for this one does not kill, nor is that one killed,’<sup>3</sup> is thus rendered in the opening stanza :

“ If the red slayer think he slays,  
Or if the slain think he is slain,  
They know not well the subtle ways  
I keep, and pass, and turn again.”

The succeeding stanzas will be made out also as clear reminiscences of the *Gita* teaching :

“ Far or forgot to me is near ;  
Shadow and sunlight are the same ;  
The vanquished gods to me appear ;  
And one to me are shame and fame.

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson : *The Ancient Sage*

<sup>2</sup> *Kathopanishad* (Max Muller's translation)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

“ They reckon ill who leave me out ;  
 When me they fly, I am the wings ;  
 I am the doubter and the doubt,  
 And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.”

At the end, the all-regnant Principle, Power, Presence and Personality admitting of naught that is plural, dual or divided by its side, is identified with Supreme Goodness or *Sivam* ; and the experience of this revelation of Grace is affirmed as the all-sufficing, otherwise unattainable, salvation of the soul.

“ The strong gods pine for my abode,  
 And pine in vain the sacred Seven ;  
 But thou, meek lover of the good !  
 Find me and turn thy back on heaven.”

This is in adaptation of the *Upanishadic* verse :  
 ‘ That Self cannot be gained by the *Veda*, nor by understanding, nor by much learning. He whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained. The Self chooses him (his body) as his own.’<sup>1</sup>  
 Especially in the closing line, “ Find me, and turn thy back on heaven,” we have the essence of the Divine summons, for an exact and exquisite counterpart to which in human supplication we may well travel to the living genius of Celtic idealism in George Russell’s verses on *Creation*,<sup>2</sup> familiarised

<sup>1</sup> *Kathopanishad and Mundakopanishad* (Max Muller’s translation)

<sup>2</sup> *Homeward Songs by the Way* (A. E.)

to us, by a fellow-poet of the Irish School, as another performer, in such esoteric pieces as *Krishna*, of 'the miracle of incarnating the soul of the East in the body of the West.'<sup>1</sup>

' O Master of the beautiful,  
Creating us from hour to hour,  
Give me this vision to the full  
To see in lightest things thy power.

' This vision give, no heaven afar,  
No throne, and yet I will rejoice  
Knowing beneath my feet a star,  
Thy word in every wandering voice.'

Is it any wonder at all that, when it first appeared in the opening number of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Emerson's aforesaid gem of mystic truth made itself but the butt of coarse, unsparing banter from all around ?

Next, in the poem on **Worship**, that most spiritual of functions is appraised as the source of the moral dynamic which has ever made the hero and the martyr and which evermore guarantees the triumph of truth and right through 'the life of God in the soul of man.'

" This is he, who, felled by foes,  
Sprung harmless up, refreshed by blows :  
He to captivity was sold,  
But him no prison-bars would hold :

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Cousins : *Modern Poetry in the English Language*

Though they sealed him in a rock,  
Mountain chains he can unlock :  
Thrown to lions for their meat,  
The crouching lion kissed his feet :  
Bound to the stake, no flames appalled,  
But arched o'er him an honouring vault."

Of communion with such wonder-working effects the basis is found deep down in community of nature.

“ Draw, if thou canst, the mystic line  
Severing rightly his from thine.  
Which is human, which divine.”

“ More near than aught thou call’st thy own ”  
—such is Jove to Emerson, in words that at once  
reproduce Tennyson’s Higher Pantheism :

‘ Speak to Him thou, for He hears, and Spirit  
with Spirit can meet —  
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer  
than hands and feet.’

Is it not along this very line that mysticism—not the sophism of metaphysic but the experience of ‘ecstasy’—has uniformly moved and matured in all quarters where the ‘individuality’ of the conditioned self, which lives in opposition to others, becomes, in the ‘converted life’ of the regenerate, ennobled and exalted into a ‘personality’ which, being itself, yet lives in and for others until, or, in proportion as, it grows more and more

in and into the 'omnipersonality' of the unconditioned Self ? So, God is all and all-in-all ; and, in terms of the beatific consciousness of the Christ, 'I and my Father are one,' or, of the Sufi,<sup>1</sup> 'Within my vesture is naught but God,' or, again, of the Vedantin, '*Sachchidanandaroopabrahmaivaham, aham brahmasmi.*' And what is worship but so to lose the self in order to gain it ?

Two pieces, headed respectively **Grace** and **Spiritual Laws**, touch upon that rarest of topics amidst all the serenity of Emerson's writings, the question of sin—of protection against, and progress through, sin. The one does it by way of thanksgiving to "Preventing God" for the "parapet" of "Example, custom, fear, occasion slow" set round against

" the roaring gulf below,  
The depths of sin to which I had descended,  
Had not these me against myself defended."

And the other does it by means of enunciating the law of men's rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things

" by the famous might that lurks  
In reaction and recoil,  
Makes flame to freeze and ice to boil  
Forging, through swart arms of Offence  
The silver seat of Innocence."

<sup>1</sup> Bayazid (vide F. H. Davis: *The Persian Mystics*—Wisdom of the East Series)

**The Problem** and **The World-Soul**, two other rubies that lend no little lustre to the rosary of sacred songs, rank, on all accounts, among the most familiar, free-flowing and far-sweeping of Emerson's poems, containing as they do some lines of superb beauty alike of form and thought upon the subject of God as the God of past institutions as well as of present inspirations. Well might Emerson join with Hosmer, the hymnologist, in the comprehensive affirmation, 'One thought I have, my ample creed,' meaning the doctrine of the Living God by whom every human aim and accomplishment, conception and communion, system and scripture, ever known were breathed into being in order to answer (as they must adequately have answered in their day) needs divinely implanted and hence all too real and natural for the time being—

'each in its degree  
Substantial, and all ennobling in their turn.' <sup>1</sup>

For, as Carlyle phrases it with a voice of authority, 'Whatsoever has existed has had its value : without some truth and worth lying in it, the thing could not have hung together, and been the organ and sustenance, and method of action, for men that reasoned and were alive.' <sup>2</sup> Then, well

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth : *The Excursion*

<sup>2</sup> Johnson



might Emerson rehearse the utterance of the Solitary in *The Excursion* :

‘ The outward ritual and established forms  
With which communities of men invest  
These inward feelings, and the aspiring vows  
To which the lips give public utterance  
Are both a natural process ; and by me  
Shall pass uncensured.’

It is this view of the inherent divineness of all human effort in thought-life and art-life, that is, of the necessary inclusiveness and harmony of all God’s truth variously expressed through human minds, voices and hands as part of ‘ natural history ’ in the gradual flowerings of a spiritual energy knowing no final rightness or wrongness in the innate diversities of historic creeds and ceremonials, schools and synagogues, churches and chapels, politics and philosophies—it is this sweetly reasonable, scientifically synthetic, practically catholic view—that the poem on *The Problem* enforces. And this it does through a series of miniature lyrics in language that will surely bear iteration for the glory of its sentiment and the grandeur of its style.

“ Not from a vain or shallow thought  
His awful Jove young Phidias brought ;  
Never from lips of cunning fell  
The thrilling Delphic oracle ;  
Out from the heart of nature rolled  
The burdens of the Bible old ;

The litanies of nations came,  
Like the volcano's tongue of flame,  
Up from the burning core below,—  
The canticles of love and woe ;  
The hand that rounded Peter's dome,  
And groined the aisles of Christian Rome,  
Wrought in a sad sincerity ;  
Himself from God he could not free ;  
He builded better than he knew ;—  
The conscious stone to beauty grew.  
Know'st thou what wove yon woodbird's nest  
Of leaves and feathers from her breast ?  
Or how the fish outbuilt her shell,  
Painting with morn each annual cell ?  
Or how the sacred pine-tree adds  
To her old leaves new myriads ?  
Such and so grew these holy piles,  
Whilst love and terror laid the tiles.  
Earth proudly wears the Parthenon,  
As the best gem upon her zone,  
And Morning opes with haste her lids,  
To gaze upon the Pyramids ;  
O'er England's abbeyes bends the sky,  
As on its friends, with kindred eye ;  
For, out of Thought's interior sphere  
These wonders rose to upper air ;  
And Nature gladly gave them place,  
Adopted them into her race."

And then, the continuation :

" These temples grew as grows the grass ;  
Art might obey, but not surpass.  
The passive Master lent his hand  
To the vast soul that o'er him planned ;

And the same power that reared the shrine,  
Bestrode the tribes that knelt within.  
Ever the fiery Pentecost  
Girds with one flame the countless host,  
Trances the heart through chanting choirs,  
And through the priest the mind inspires.  
The word unto the prophet spoken  
Was writ on tables yet unbroken ;  
The word by seers or sibyls told,  
In groves of oak, or fanes of gold,  
Still floats upon the morning wind,  
Still whispers to the willing mind.  
One accent of the Holy Ghost  
The heedless world hath never lost."

Thus, the theologian whose whole theology and confession of faith is couched in the few but pregnant words, "I conceive a man as always spoken to from behind"—the believer in the Pentecost Perennial and the Church Universal—finds not only in the poet and the prophet but also in the artist and the architect of widely differing epochs only diverse, not discordant, keys thoroughly plastic and pliant for the swelling strains of Cosmic Evolution and Harmony. And thus, all so-called man-made—too often branded as devil-born—forms and formulas, seers and scriptures, institutions and dispensations, come to compel the utmost reverence in that outlook in which the artificial is merged in the natural and the natural uplifted into the supernatural and all broken lights become blending lights within the prism of the

One Lord who is infinitely more than our little systems that have their day and cease to be. Inasmuch as "These temples grew as grows the grass," or, as we have the self-same thought in Carlyle, 'The respectable Teutonic Languages, Teutonic Practices, Existences, all came of their own accord, as the grass springs, as the trees grow,'<sup>1</sup> the tender, devout lover of the woodbird-nest, of the fish-shell and of the pine-leaf is seen also as the deep, pious admirer of the sacred architecture of the ancient Parthenon and Pyramids, the mediaeval dome of St. Peter's and the modern abbeys of England. Thus it is given to Emerson to perceive how all exquisitely great works of art harmonise with the natural scenery in which they are set and even become themselves a part of nature's perfection. He holds with Wordsworth that

' They dreamt not of a perishable home  
Who thus could build.'<sup>2</sup>

Also, side by side with the Delphic oracle and the burdens of the Bible, he venerates

" Old *Chrysostom*. best Augustine.

...                      ...                      ...

Taylor, the Shakespeare of divines."

<sup>1</sup> *Past and Present*

<sup>2</sup> *Inside of King's College Chapel, Cambridge*

*The World-Soul* is virtually a review of outer conditions and a recapitulation of inner convictions. It opens with a joyous anthem-peal of thanksgiving to and for the incorrupt innocences " of the morning light," " the foaming sea," " the green-haired forest free," " the man of courage," " the maids of holy mind " and

" the boy with his games undaunted,  
Who never looks behind."

And this provides a heartening set-off against the solemn warning-note that follows against the withering secularisms of the age in the varied walks of life :

" Cities of proud hotels,  
Houses of rich and great,  
Vice nestles in your chambers,  
Beneath your roofs of slate.  
It cannot conquer folly,  
Time-and-space-conquering steam,  
And the light-outspeeding telegraph  
Bears nothing on its beam.

" The politics are base ;  
The letters do not cheer ;  
And 'tis far in the deeps of history  
The voice that speaketh clear.  
Trade and the streets ensnare us,  
Our bodies are weak and worn ;  
We plot and corrupt each other,  
And we despoil the unborn."

The godless degeneracy grows, it is added, because  
 overhot heedlessness must continue blind to 'the  
 open secret,' beset though on all sides by angelic  
 ministers of saving grace in

"Some figure of noble guise,—  
 Our angel, in a stranger's form.  
 Or woman's pleading eyes ;  
 Or only a flashing sunbeam,"

or Music's "beautiful disdain."

"Yon ridge of purple landscape,  
 Yon sky between the walls,  
 Hold all the hidden wonders,  
 In scanty intervals."

And yet, alas !

"We cannot learn the cypher  
 That's writ upon our cell ;  
 Stars help us by a mystery  
 Which we could never spell."

... ..

"Still, still the secret presses ;  
 The nearing clouds draw down ;  
 The crimson morning flames into  
 The fopperies of the town.  
 Within, without the idle earth,  
 Stars weave eternal rings ;  
 The sun himself shines heartily,  
 And shares the joy he brings."

Deaf, however, to Nature's *Te Deum* of perpetual  
 jubilee, materialistic man contentedly shuts him-

self up within the gilded walls of his glamorous civilisation, which, rightly understood,

“ are but sailing foam-bells  
 Along Thought's causing stream,  
 And take their shape and sun-colour  
 From him that sends the dream.”

None the less, there rings forth the assurance of Destiny, by no means to be balked or baffled by the delusions, degradations and despondencies of the errant human spirit. The World-Soul, as at once the In-Soul and the Over-Soul of all, the *Virat-Purusha*,

“ He is no churl nor trifter,  
 And his viceroy is none,—  
 Love-without-weakness,—  
 Of Genius sire and son.  
 And his will is not thwarted ;  
 The seeds of land and sea  
 Are the atoms of his body bright,  
 And his behests obey.”

Consequently, His supreme will of Love cannot but fulfil itself in that

‘ one far-off divine event,  
 To which the whole creation moves,’

ever replacing weakness and deformity by strength and beauty and anon advancing from strength to strength, from beauty to beauty.

“ When the old world is sterile,  
And the ages are effete,  
He will from wrecks and sediment  
The fairer world complete ;  
He forbids to despair ;  
His cheeks mantle with mirth ;  
And the unimagined good of men  
Is yeanning at the birth.”

Finally, the poem chants, and so shall our souls also rise to chant, the paean of eternal progress in and through that Love to which the dream of the future and the far-off is even the vision of the present and the proximate.

“ Love wakes anew this throbbing heart,  
And we are never old.  
Over the winter glaciers,  
I see the summer glow,  
And through the wild-piled snow-drift  
The warm rosebuds below.”

Or, as the Ancient Sage's vision finds utterance through another modern sage,

‘ She sees the Best that glimmers thro’ the Worst,  
She feels the Sun is hid but for a night,  
She spies the summer thro’ the winter bud,  
She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,  
She hears the lark within the songless egg,  
She finds the fountain where they wail’d  
“ Mirage ” ! ’ ’



So it is that, with far, far less of mystification in him than abounds in Blake, the earlier mystic of *The Auguries of Innocence*, Emerson proves himself of immeasurable help in enabling you even now and here, from the true idealist's angle of vision, more and more

' To see a world in a grain of sand  
And a heaven in a wild flower  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour.'

Last of all, our studies may fitly terminate with devoutly thinking the thoughts, over again, of **The Nun's Aspiration**. There can scarcely be anything worthier than the appropriation of its old-world piety coupled with new-world naturalism—both mystically suffused in full with the purest element of spiritual imagination. Wordsworth's 'quiet' 'nun breathless with adoration'<sup>1</sup> is here Emerson's model nun articulate with aspiration, breathing aloud the peculiar and intense longings of a dedicated life thrown in upon Providence. Hers is the "heart's content" that, 'with a heart for any fate,' would 'take no thought for the morrow' but exclaim, "Well for those who have no fear"<sup>2</sup> (even about the possible contents of such things as **Letters** received in the simple round of daily routine).

<sup>1</sup> *It is a beauteous evening*

<sup>2</sup> *Letters*

“ Yet in the name of Godhead, I  
The morrow front, and can defy ;  
Though I am weak, yet God, when prayed,  
Cannot withhold his conquering aid.”

Hers is the sense, tranquil as even “ childhood’s  
thought,” of “ happy stoic Nature’s ” solace and  
sympathy when life’s “ web ” is marred into

“ a blot  
On life’s fair picture of delight.”

Here is the abnegation of “ vanity and guilt ” “ on  
this altar God hath built.” Hers is all immunity  
from “ Hope or Passion,”

“ Hearing as now the lofty dirge  
Which blasts of Northern mountains hymn—  
Nature’s funeral, high and dim,—  
Sable pageantry of clouds,  
Mourning summer laid in shrouds.”

Hers is the optimistic trust that, before life’s end,

“ Many a day shall dawn and die,  
Many an angel wander by,  
And, passing, light my sunken turf.”

At the same time and above all, hers is a tran-  
scendent other-worldliness yearning to move away  
from the “ dream ” of this life into the reality of

the life beyond and to pierce through the outer veils  
of Time and Space into Eternity and Immensity :

“ On earth I dream ;—I die to be :  
Time ! shake not thy bald head at me.  
I challenge thee to hurry past,  
Or for my turn to fly too fast.  
Think me not numbed or halt with age,  
Or cares that earth to earth engage,  
Caught with love’s cord of twisted beams,  
Or mired by climate’s gross extremes.  
I tire of shams, I rush to Be,  
I pass with yonder comet free,—  
Pass with the comet into space  
Which mocks thy aeons to embrace ;  
Aeons which tardily unfold  
Realm beyond realm—extent untold.”

Blessed are they who make this devout, dauntless  
“ aspiration ” their own through time and for eter-  
nity ! And happy they who can find the word and  
work of this our *vates sacer*, our *siddhapurusha*,  
pre-eminently helpful to this supreme end in the  
whole ‘ cloud of witness ’ that evermore surrounds  
the lover of letters !

‘ Blessings be with them—and eternal praise,  
Who gave us nobler loves, and nobler cares—  
The Poets, who on earth have made us heirs  
Of truth and pure delight by heavenly lays ! ’ <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth : *Personal Talk* (Lines cut upon the pedestal of his  
own statue at Westminster Abbey)

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W. J. Long's *Outlines of American Literature* refers to a poem entitled *Written in Rome*, 'which speaks of the society he (Emerson) found in solitude.' But the poem itself is not to be found in any of the available editions.

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